

Sustainable Human Resource Management Practices: A Need of the Hour

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Abstract: *Since a long time, a unanimous consensus has been witnessed for the need of a genuine environmental management in all types of organizations across the globe. It has been emphasized due to the widespread realization that industrial waste has been the prime culprit to deteriorate and deplete natural resources at an alarming speed; and at the same time saving the environment has become an imperative goal for the existence of mankind on the earth. This paper intends to throw light on the fact that to follow environmental friendly human resource (HR) practices are the need of the hour for the business; to be more efficient, effective, and productive. The HR managers have to play an important and impactful role in setting up the great culture of developing and following sustainable practices, policies, programs, and systems to make the entity or planet green, when we all are sharing the common universe; because the organizational workforce has been found largest contributor to pollution and waste. Furthermore, with increased globalization, the focus on sustainable environment has assumed a key strategy in the organizations across countries because the performance of entity is not only judged on the basis of financial results to make investment; rather its initiatives on other non-financial parameters like environmental-sensitivity, social responsibility, and corporate governance; have also gained a significant importance. Hence, the role of HR department is very crucial to devise ways and means to formulate and adopt green polices. The study is useful to HR managers, organizations, employees, academicians, and policy makers, who wish to comprehend and improve the green culture of entity through the concrete efforts of HR department.*

Keywords: *Environment Sensitivity, Green Practices, Human Resource, Management, Planet*

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I. Introduction

Traditionally, the companies used to concentrate only on achieving financial goals; and human-linked issues were occupying the back seat at management's desk (Maley, (2014). But, now the emphasis is growing on the development of corporate sector led by sustainable practices. The Kramar (2022) pointed out that sustainable human resource (HR) is focused to reap benefits in various areas simultaneously for the company, such as, social, economic, ethical, and ecological. The stress is that resources must be utilized in a way that the needs of present generation are fulfilled without compromising the availability of scarce resources for future generations, so that their needs may also be fulfilled. It is pointing out towards the efforts of eliminating wastages; and economical use of natural resources while conducting business. To foster this feeling among human beings, probably our ancestors started worshipping nature in different forms.

The green strategies are seen as the buzzword of the time, and are embraced by increasing number of enterprises who desires to mitigate the challenges and misfortunes posed by natural calamities or climate change, like Covid 19 which brought business activities to a halt. The entities may move forward successfully in the green journey, only through top-down approach of the HR management (Chams & García-Blandón, 2019). Companies who incorporate environmental practices into the field of HR policies enjoy competitive edge over others. Further, due to increasing awareness of environmental issues among masses; it has also been observed that many employees feel their responsibility to maintain ecological balance at work place, and prefer to choose environmentally conscious employers.

The green HR may be adjudicated as contribution of HR policies and practices in the entity's environmental agenda. The HR-related processes are connected through a central system of computer net-works. The entire workforce is facilitated to interact directly with each other including managers; which results in elimination of delays, inaccuracies, and inefficiencies found in paper-bound system. It is clearly pointing out towards the encouragement of paper-less offices to save earth; since paper is made of trees. This practice is directing the organization to create work places which inculcate the habit of following regular plantation drive in campus or off-campus areas; to prepare an "army of trees" or "green umbrella" to fight with elements endangering the environment.

The Piwowar-Sulej (2021) outlined that green HR management is nothing but the integration of entity's environmental management to the various HR processes, such as, hiring, training and development, performance appraisal, and reward system for employees. To recruit qualified staff, the HR functions must be adapted to be "green", like online or video interviews maybe arranged to minimize travel requirements. In fact, the sustainable HR management is introduced even before the initiation of the process of recruitment. It gets started with the designing and approval of job analysis; which is composed of job description, and job specification. The advertisement for hiring new employees indicates that the entity recognizes and promotes environmental concerns; and prospective employees are expected to be of similar ideology. Even the job descriptions highlight the tasks related and oriented towards green aspects because it tends to improve employer's communication and branding. It further enriches the value or goodwill of belongingness to the corporate to attract and retain the talented and qualified workforce. The HR manager focuses, and evaluates the applicants; having aptitude and respect towards green practices. The simple questions in written test or interview about the correlation between the climate change and business growth may be asked to judge the degree of ecological inclination, awareness or understanding. It helps in providing an overview about the green behavior of a potential employee in the organization, and on its basis a sustainability score may be assigned to each applicant. In this way, the HR manager may direct the process of recruitment and selection towards attaining the green objectives of the entity.

In addition to this, the HR policy may include technology which allows firms to be paperless and office less hiring of employees. Online portals through the use of internet may be used for various tasks, such as, to receive curriculum vitae (CV), invite for tests or interview, seek references, provide offer letters, and orientation schedule. The induction programme, and on-the-job training may be designed and integrated in such a manner that it highlights the green culture, values, and concerns of the company; so that the initiatives undertaken in the direction of sustainable actions, and the related outcomes may be introduced to the new-comers.

The green initiatives are further emphasized through the HR policies of performance management. It is a tool in the hands of HR managers which encourages the workforce to boost their professional skills, talents, and capabilities that assist to accomplish the organizational objectives. The green measurable targets are included in the roles and responsibilities of employees through job descriptions, focused by way of green training and development, and are motivated through compensation package.

The learning process encompasses various goals, such as, creating awareness about present ecological problems on the globe via interaction with green organizations; educating staff about methods and processes that end up to reduce waste, recycle and reuse resources, and save energy like turning off lights or water taps when not in use. The green training enables employees to enhance their skills, knowledge, attitudes, behavior, and perspective in favor of eco-friendly actions; and also assists in preventing the deterioration of environmental awareness. It also sharpens their skills to resolve environment related issues or problems while producing and packaging eco-friendly products to bring "cheers" for prospective customers too.

The employee's compensation package identifies the degree of involvement and contribution of employee in creating more sustainable organization, and links the interest of staff to organizational green platform. To put it differently, the employee is rewarded for helping in achieving sustainability targets fully or partially, by providing special compensation in various forms, such as, monetary benefits in the form of hike in salary, and cash incentives; and non-monetary package by sanctioning special leaves with gift vouchers for national or international trip; and extending public praise, and recognition by higher management. The HR policy of compensating employees through "special green awards" for staff members who suggest and implement innovative sustainable ideas in the organization; pushes the workforce towards more environmental friendly mindset and behavior. Jamal et al., (2021) carried out a survey on the basis of primary data, and established a positive and significant link between corporate sustainability and green HR practices by way of green hiring, and compensation of employees. However, this type of association was missing with the green training policy of HR department.

After this introductory section, the literature review has been described in section 2. The section 3 is throwing light on the research methodology and objectives of study. Then, an elaborative discussion has been made in the section 4. The last section presents the summary along with limitations of study and a few suggestions for further scope of research.

II. Literature Review

The various studies have been steered to address different issues related to multiple aspects of green HR management.

Lee (2009) depicted green HR management as the process whereby firms manage the environment by following set of policies and programs which focus to have balance between industrial growth, and protection of natural resources so that future generations may also flourish and enjoy the nature.

Jerome (2013) pointed out that the sustainable HR practices impact performance of organization, but it is the responsibility of leaders to frame suitable ecological policies by involving entire workforce.

Kramar (2014) described that sustainable practices seeks linkage between HR management and sustainability, and acknowledged that this association has led to higher performance of the enterprise. He further emphasized the significance of green initiatives for enterprise and other stakeholders.

Mazur (2015) found that human resources being the most valuable of all resources, the green approach to HR management has emerged as a significant source of sustained competitive advantage and enhanced market value of enterprise.

Jarlstrom et al., (2018) thrown light on the perspective of top management with regard to different pillars of sustainable HR management, like transparency, equality, social justice, profitability, and employees safety and well-being. They also revealed that the ecological efforts are required through HR management to maximize the welfare of diverse set of stakeholders, such as, customers, employees, investors, managers, and policy makers.

Chams & García-Blandón (2019) highlighted that human resource manager may develop a strategic structure of policies and processes to avoid outcomes that are detrimental to environment and society. To attain the same, employees' must be trained and a provision of green rewards may be evolved to motivate them.

Davidescu et al., (2020) applied logistic regression model to the data, and explored that the flexible working time, and hybrid model of workplace i.e. the mix of working from home and office are the ideal options for organizations to improve upon the sustainability parameter. It has resulted in increasing the performance of entity, and level of employee's satisfaction which further multiplies the sustainable efforts.

Arab Kalmeri et al., (2021) established that there is lack of direct positive and significant relationship between sustainable HR efforts and reputation of engineering firms.

Sharma et al., (2022) examined that the alignment of information technology with green initiatives; enhances the employability skills, knowledge, and positive attitude of employees which may be considered as a key to promote sustainable HR development.

Kutieshat & Farmanesh (2022) investigated that during the COVID 19 worldwide pandemic, the new HR policy in the form of providing online working facility for employees has augmented the innovative performance and cleaner and healthier environment on the globe.

III. Research Methodology

Statement of Problem

There is worldwide consensus to manage the environment. It has been realized that business should be conducted in a way that it should not harm the nature by releasing harmful gases, chemicals, and continuous depletion of natural resources. Therefore, the need of the hour is to support and implement the HR management strategies to achieve the green goals of organizations.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are:

- 1) To stress the need among organizational workforce to achieve environmental-friendly goals of organization;
- 2) To understand the importance of embedding green initiatives in HR policies, practices, methods, processes, and programs; and
- 3) To reiterate to HR managers regarding the need of their proactive role to implement the culture of sustainable HR management in the organization.

Research Design

The descriptive model of research has been followed in the present paper. An effort has been made to emphasize the significance of HR policies which may be used by organizational leaders to accomplish sustainable development goals.

IV. Discussion

The sustainable HR management may be viewed as organizational manifesto to create environmental-sensitive workforce which may prove to be a valuable asset; to understand, implement, promote, and appreciate green culture in the enterprise. Moreover, the alignment of green dimensions with HR policy is the need to maintain ecological balance which entails increase in productivity, better employee retention, reduced costs, and enhanced sales volume. The HR department may review periodically, how the commercial activities are being carried out; and may identify how the employees may work differently to save the environment and generate significant effect on environmental competitiveness of the entity.

There are different ways by which a company may go green through HR management policies like promoting the use, and purchase of products and/or services that enhance sustainability culture, such as, porcelain cups for tea and coffee, and electronic documentation and communication to avoid or reduce the use of paper in the office. It may include encouragement to car-pool, use of public transport, work from home, and enthusiastic participation in green efforts made by entity. The companies may come up with the provision of disciplinary actions or punishment to staff where the breach of green policies or environmental hostile behavior is observed.

To enhance ecological balance by reducing carbon footprints and reducing waste to an optimum level, the various steps may be promoted by HR department through duly planned policies regarding internal working, such as, use of e-mails for communication; teleconferencing through online platforms like ZOOM or Google Meet; use of recycled paper, and water; encouragement to the use of eco-friendly goods like energy efficient tube lights, and other electrical appliances; keeping plants in pots to minimize carbon footprints in office; and making available cycles to employees to commute at short distances. The emphasis must be laid down on the need to design and develop green products and processes for customers.

Apart from that entity must respect and abide by environmental laws enacted by the government. The employees must be motivated to create awareness on environmental issues by organizing seminars, rallies, and distributing plants to public. The provision may be made to confer annual green rewards, and awards to recognize the green practices followed by workforce. It is beneficial to all segments of society connected in one way or the other to the entity, especially, organization, employees, and employer. Therefore, it may be argued that HR manager must play a proactive role to devise ways and means through incentives; to accelerate the pace of implementation and acceptance of sustainable policies.

As the size of “sustainable-wall” broadens up, the entity reaps the benefits on improved corporate social responsibility front by enhancing the satisfaction level of all stakeholders. The organization gets strength to manage ecological risks in a better way as innovative ideas are emphasized and facilitated. The stress on paper-less working, and saving of scarce resources, such as, energy and water results in efficient and effective utilization of available resources; further pushes up the brand image and reputation of the entity. The efforts, time, and cost attached to labor turnover are also decreased to a large extent. To put it differently, the quality of entity tends to boost up in terms of internal and external working, and recognition. Moreover, when firm itself adopts sustainable HR management, the intervention of government and other environmental law enforcing agencies get reduced; rather firm tend to earn appreciation for green initiatives, and making the smoother work environment.

Green practices like serving fruits and raw vegetables with healthier drinks in HR meetings may lead to improvement of physiological and psychological health of employees, and reduces fatigue and absenteeism. It not only improves retention rate of employees by raising their morale but also attracts qualified and experienced employees. The level of ecological consciousness increases among staff that labels them as respectable corporate citizens; and their behavior is shaped or refined towards environmental friendly information, thoughts, and actions at work place and in personal life.

The employer enjoys the improved brand reputation in the eyes of investors who nowadays prefer to invest in sustainable funds of firm’s which are aware, respect, and follow environmental friendly practices and policies. The higher goodwill has the capacity to enhance sales and push up the financial health of enterprise.

However, implementation and growth of sustainable HR practices are not free from challenges for the managers. The evolution of green initiatives is a time consuming and lengthy process. It needs huge investment in on-line networks and systems, and training to staff which would be an additional cost to the organization. Initially, it may drive entity into losses or low returns. Moreover, there may be few employees who may not understand and implement the need of green initiatives in the organization; therefore, posing a challenge before managers to motivate and transform the attitude of workforce. Sometimes, appraisal of green behavior of employee becomes difficult to award “green credits”; and transferring related benefits. A major challenge before HR manger is also observed in selecting and developing “green leaders” who may carry sustainable practices to future; by setting up required working processes, making available green equipment, and nurturing green thinking in the organization. But, such problems may be faced at initial stage, which may be countered by enhanced training and education regarding sustainable goals, and focusing on relative benefits of going-green for entity and earth.

V. Conclusion

The sustainable practices may be viewed as alignment of human resource management practices with organization’s environmental goals and practices. Human beings are the only “living resource” of production for commercial organizations who may take initiatives to save the planet from carbonizing and pollution; and ensure efficient and effective use of natural resources. They are the only instruments to translate green policies or programs into practice. Hence, the role of HR department is very decisive to achieve sustainable goals; and

making the earth a better place for breathing and survival of mankind; and preserving the ozone layer. The green efforts are beneficial to the business also in terms of reducing cost, enhancing goodwill; promoting healthy work environment, and improving brand value of entity at national and international level. In fact, following the sustainable HR practices has become “slogan” of the time, and has assumed an important place in the organization’s culture in forward-looking enterprises around the world. But, to attain sustainable goals; the management requires high level of technical and managerial skills. The researchers are emphasizing that continuous efforts are needed on the part of HR manager to inspire, empower, train, and appreciate green initiatives of employees because there is no other planet or alternative place where all of us may shift to live a healthy and peaceful life. Therefore, it may be argued that HR department must adopt means and ways to promote green culture which is a significant requirement for survival of entity, and life on earth. Although, the challenges may be faced initially; but “becoming and going-green” is the need of the hour.

The present paper is helpful to diverse group of stakeholders, such as, HR manager, employees, customers, investors, law makers, academicians, and environment-protectionists; who desire to understand and improve sustainable practices and the related role of HR management; and are also interested in carrying forward the green agenda on war-footing to save the planet. The main limitation of study is that it is arguing on the subject under discussion on theoretical base; which may be tested empirically. Therefore, a study may be undertaken by future researchers on the basis of primary or secondary data to further supplement the various issues raised in the present paper.

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