
GREEN HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT: A CONCEPTUAL EXPLORATION**OSAMAGUMWENDE** Blessing Adagbonyin¹, **EHIMWENMA** Enaruna Idubor, **PhD**²

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Abstract

This paper provides a comprehensive exploration of Green Human Resource Management (GHRM), examining its conceptual underpinnings, practical applications, and strategic implications. In an era of increasing environmental awareness and stakeholder pressure, organisations are recognising the crucial role of HRM in driving sustainability initiatives. This paper aims to clarify the concept of GHRM, delving into its definition and scope. It explores the theoretical foundations of GHRM, drawing upon established frameworks such as the Resource-Based View (RBV), Stakeholder Theory, and Resource Dependency Theory to explain why organisations adopt green HR practices. The paper identifies and elaborates on key GHRM practice. These practices are examined in detail, highlighting their specific contributions to organisational sustainability. Furthermore, this exploration critically discusses the benefits that organisations can derive from implementing GHRM, such as enhanced employer branding, cost savings through resource efficiency, and improved organisational performance. Conversely, the paper also acknowledges and analyzes the challenges associated with GHRM implementation, including lack of awareness, difficulties in measuring effectiveness, and resistance to change. By providing a holistic overview of GHRM, the contributed to a deeper understanding of its significance in promoting both organisational success and environmental sustainability. It concludes by suggesting avenues for future research in this evolving field.

Keywords: Green human resource management, green recruitment and selection, green compensation, resource-based view, stakeholder theory

Introduction

In today's global landscape, there is an escalating imperative for organisations to adopt sustainable practices to mitigate environmental degradation and promote long-term ecological balance (Ercantan & Eyupoglu, 2022; UN, 2025). This urgency aligns with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 12, which emphasises responsible consumption and production patterns (UN, 2024). Organisations play a pivotal role in achieving these objectives by integrating sustainability into their core operations.

Human Resource Management (HRM) serves as a critical conduit in embedding sustainability within organisational culture and practices (Ercantan & Eyupoglu, 2022). Aligning HRM strategies with environmental objectives can foster organisations' workforce that is not only aware of but also actively engaged in sustainable initiatives. This integration has given rise to the concept of Green Human Resource Management (GHRM), which focuses on implementing HRM policies and practices that promote the sustainable use of resources within organisations (Awan & Khan, 2015; Mwita, 2020).

Despite its significance, there remains a lack of comprehensive understanding of GHRM due to the limited number of studies that thoroughly explore its dimensions and applications (Mwita, 2020; Publie, 2018). This paucity of research underscores the need for a conceptual exploration to elucidate the principles, practices, and potential impacts of GHRM.

The objectives of this paper are to; define and elaborate on the concept of Green Human Resource Management; examine its theoretical foundations; identify key GHRM practices; and discuss the benefits and challenges associated with its implementation. The structure of the paper is organised as follows: The first section provides an introduction to the global need for sustainable practices and the emergence of GHRM. The second section delves into the conceptual framework of GHRM, offering definitions and theoretical underpinnings. The third section identifies and discusses key GHRM practices. The fourth section examines the benefits and challenges of implementing GHRM. Finally, the paper concludes with a summary of findings and suggestions for future research directions.

Literature Review

Theoretical Foundations

Relevant HRM theories supporting Green HRM include the resource-based view, stakeholder theory, and resource dependency theories. They are discussed below.

Resource-Based View (RBV): The Resource-Based View (RBV) theory suggests that a firm's competitive advantage stems from possessing valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) resources (Barney, 1991). In the context of GHRM, a company's commitment to environmental sustainability, reflected in its green HR practices, can be considered a valuable and rare resource. Organisations that effectively implement GHRM can develop a unique "green" organisational culture, attract and retain environmentally conscious talent, and enhance their reputation as responsible corporate citizens. These resources can be difficult for competitors to imitate, especially if they are deeply embedded in the organisation's values and practices. By leveraging these resources, organisations can achieve a competitive edge in the marketplace.

Stakeholder Theory: Stakeholder theory emphasises the importance of considering the interests of all stakeholders, including employees, customers, suppliers, communities, and the environment, in organisational decision-making (Freeman, 1984). GHRM aligns with this theory by recognising that environmental sustainability is a key concern for various stakeholders. By implementing green HR practices, organisations demonstrate their commitment to environmental protection and social responsibility, which can enhance their relationships with stakeholders. Employees may be more motivated and engaged when working for an environmentally responsible company, customers may be more likely to purchase products from sustainable businesses, and communities may be more supportive of organisations that actively contribute to environmental well-being.

Resource Dependency Theory: Resource Dependency Theory (RDT) posits that organisations are dependent on external resources for their survival and success (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). In today's world, environmental resources are becoming increasingly scarce and critical. Organisations that effectively manage their environmental impact and demonstrate a commitment to sustainability are more likely to secure access to these resources. GHRM can help organisations reduce their dependence on finite resources by promoting resource efficiency, waste reduction, and the use of renewable energy. By doing so,

organisations can ensure their long-term sustainability and resilience in the face of environmental challenges.

Concept of Green Human Resource Management

Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) has been defined in various ways by scholars and practitioners. The Green Human Resource Management Institute (GHRM) (2025) defines GHRM as the use of HRM policies to promote the sustainable use of resources within organisations and, more generally, promotes the causes of environmental sustainability. Another perspective defines GHRM as a set of policies, practices, and systems that stimulate the green behaviour of a company's employees in order to create an environmentally sensitive, resource-efficient, and socially responsible organisation (Public, 2018).

Further, GHRM is characterised as the whole of policies, practices, and systems of an organisation that makes the organisation and its employees green, for the interest of the individual, society, natural environment, and the business (MBA brief, 2025). It entails describing integrating environmental awareness and responsibility into all HR practices and processes (Ercantan & Eyupoglu, 2022).

These descriptions converge on the idea that GHRM involves the integration of environmental sustainability into human resource policies and practices. They emphasise the role of HRM in promoting eco-friendly behaviors among employees and fostering an organisational culture that prioritises environmental responsibility. Building upon these perspectives, GHRM can be defined as the strategic integration of environmental sustainability into human resource management practices, aimed at promoting eco-friendly behaviours among employees and fostering an organisational culture committed to environmental responsibility.

Evolution of Green HRM

The concept of Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) has evolved significantly over time, moving from a peripheral concern to a core component of organisational sustainability. Early mentions of environmental management within HRM focused primarily on compliance with environmental regulations (Renwick, 2021). This initial phase, often termed reactive GHRM, was characterised by organisations that respond to external pressures rather than proactively integrating environmental considerations into HR practices (Mengwei, Javier, Pingshu, James, 2024). The focus was on minimising environmental damage and adhering to legal requirements, with HR's role largely limited to implementing policies related to waste management and energy conservation in the workplace. This rudimentary understanding of GHRM laid the groundwork for subsequent developments.

As awareness of environmental issues grew, so did the understanding of GHRM's potential. The field began to shift from a reactive to a more proactive stance, with organisations recognising the strategic advantages of integrating environmental sustainability into their HR practices (Jackson, 2010). This marked the emergence of active GHRM, where organisations started to align HR policies and practices with broader environmental goals (Mengwei, et al., 2024). This involved initiatives such as green recruitment and selection, training employees on environmental sustainability, and implementing performance management systems that rewarded environmentally friendly behaviors. The emphasis moved beyond mere compliance to actively promoting environmental responsibility within the workforce.

In contemporary organisations, GHRM has evolved into a more holistic and integrated approach. It is no longer simply about implementing isolated green initiatives but rather about embedding sustainability into the very fabric of HR processes (Jose & Jabbour, 2011; Mello, 2019). Modern GHRM encompasses a wide range of activities, from developing green organisational cultures and promoting employee engagement in sustainability initiatives to integrating environmental considerations into compensation and benefits packages (Mamatha & Bharmappa, 2020). It also involves fostering a learning environment where employees are encouraged to develop their knowledge and skills related to environmental sustainability (Mamatha & Bharmappa, 2020). This comprehensive approach recognises that GHRM is not just a set of practices but a strategic philosophy that permeates all aspects of HRM.

The importance of GHRM to contemporary organisations cannot be overstated. In an era of increasing environmental awareness and stakeholder scrutiny, organisations are under immense pressure to demonstrate their commitment to sustainability (Awan & Khan, 2015; Jose & Jabbour, 2011). GHRM plays a crucial role in enabling organisations to meet these expectations by attracting and retaining talent who are passionate about environmental issues, enhancing their reputation as environmentally responsible employers, and driving innovation in sustainable practices (Awan & Khan, 2015). Moreover, GHRM can contribute to cost savings through reduced energy consumption and waste generation, improve employee morale and engagement, and enhance organisational performance in the long term (Khan, Rasli & Qureshi, 2017). The integration of environmental sustainability into HRM, can create an organisations a win-win situation for themselves, their employees, and the planet.

Link between sustainability and HRM

The link between sustainability and HRM is increasingly recognised as crucial for organisational success in the 21st century. Sustainability, broadly defined as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, has become a critical concern for businesses world-wide (Mamatha & Bharmappa, 2020). HRM, with its focus on managing the organisation's most valuable asset, its human capital plays a pivotal role in driving and implementing sustainability initiatives. Integrating sustainability into HR practices, help the organisation to foster a workforce that is not only aware of environmental and social issues but also actively engaged in promoting sustainable practices (Mamatha & Bharmappa, 2020). This connection between sustainability and HRM is not merely a trend but a fundamental shift in how organisations operate and contribute to a more sustainable future.

One key aspect of this link lies in the ability of HRM to attract, retain, and develop employees who are passionate about sustainability. As environmental and social concerns become more prominent in society, individuals are increasingly seeking to work for organisations that align with their values (Awan & Khan, 2015). Organisations that demonstrate a genuine commitment to sustainability through their HR practices, such as offering green training and development programmes, promoting work-life balance, and providing opportunities for employee involvement in sustainability initiatives, are more likely to attract and retain top talent (Bombiak & Kluska, 2018). Moreover, by embedding sustainability into performance management systems and reward structures, organisations can further incentivize employees to contribute to sustainability goals.

It follows that the creation of a workplace where sustainability is valued and integrated into everyday operations can not only reduce their environmental footprint but also enhance their reputation as responsible corporate citizens, attracting both customers and investors who prioritise sustainability.

Key Practices of Green HRM

Green recruitment and selection

Green recruitment and selection refer to the processes of attracting and choosing candidates who possess the knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics (KSAOs) necessary to contribute to an organisation's sustainability goals (Pham & Paille, 2020). Green recruitment focuses on attracting individuals who are not only qualified for the job but also demonstrate a genuine interest in environmental and social issues (Opatha, 2014; Renwick, 2021). Green selection, on the other hand, involves using selection methods that assess candidates' environmental awareness, sustainability-related skills, and their alignment with the organisation's green values (Opatha, 2014). These processes are crucial for building a workforce that is committed to and capable of driving sustainability initiatives within the organisation.

Green recruitment strategies can vary depending on the organisation's specific needs and goals. Organisations may choose to advertise job openings on platforms that target environmentally conscious individuals, such as sustainability-focused websites and job boards (Opatha, 2014).

Green selection methods aim to assess candidates' suitability for contributing to the organisation's sustainability agenda. This can involve incorporating questions related to environmental awareness and sustainability into the application process or interviews. Organisations may also use simulations or case studies that present candidates with environmental challenges and assess their problem-solving skills in a sustainability context. Furthermore, some organisations are starting to use personality tests to assess candidates' values and attitudes related to environmental responsibility. The goal is to identify candidates who not only possess the necessary job-specific skills but also demonstrate a genuine commitment to sustainability and a willingness to contribute to the organisation's environmental goals.

Green Training and Development

Green training and development (T&D) refer to the process of equipping employees with the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) necessary to understand and contribute to an organisation's sustainability goals (Chandra, 2023; Ercantan & Eyupoglu, 2022). It goes beyond simply raising awareness about environmental issues; it focuses on developing the competencies needed to implement sustainable practices in the workplace and beyond (Mello, 2019). Green T&D programmes can cover a wide range of topics, from basic environmental awareness and resource conservation to more specialised skills in areas such as green supply chain management, sustainable product development, and environmental auditing (Mamatha & Bharmappa, 2020; Opatha, 2013). The ultimate aim is to create a workforce that is not only knowledgeable about sustainability but also empowered to drive positive change within the organisation.

The design and delivery of green T&D programmes can vary depending on the organisation's specific needs and the target audience (Mamatha & Bharmappa, 2020). Organisations may choose to deliver training through a variety of methods, including online modules, workshops, seminars, and on-the-job training.

Green performance management

Green performance management integrates environmental sustainability into the traditional performance management process (Akpobolokami, 2022). It involves setting clear expectations for environmentally responsible behaviour, providing feedback on environmental performance, and recognising and rewarding employees who contribute to the organisation's sustainability goals (Akpobolokami, 2022; Awan & Khan, 2015). This approach acknowledges that employee performance is not solely about achieving financial or operational targets but also about contributing to the organisation's environmental and social responsibility efforts.

Green performance management can be implemented in various ways (Akpobolokami, 2022). Organisations can include specific environmental objectives in employee performance goals, such as reducing waste, conserving energy, or promoting sustainable practices within their teams. Performance evaluations can then assess how well employees have achieved these environmental goals, alongside their regular performance objectives.

Green compensation and rewards

Green compensation and rewards aim to incentivise and recognise employees for their contributions to an organisation's sustainability efforts (Akpobolokami, 2022; Mandago, 2018). It goes beyond traditional compensation models by incorporating environmental performance and sustainability-related behaviors into the reward structure (Akpobolokami, 2022). This approach acknowledges that employees play a crucial role in achieving an organisation's sustainability goals, and it seeks to motivate them to actively participate in green initiatives. One way to implement green compensation is by linking a portion of employee bonuses or salary increases to the achievement of specific environmental targets. This direct link between financial rewards and environmental performance can be a powerful motivator, encouraging employees to prioritise sustainability in their daily work (Akpobolokami, 2022; Chandra, 2023).

Benefits of Green HRM

Green HRM practices offer a multitude of benefits, both for organisations and the environment. For organisations, one key advantage lies in enhanced employer branding and improved attraction and retention of talent. In an increasingly environmentally conscious world, individuals are more likely to seek employment with organisations that demonstrate a commitment to sustainability (Awan & Khan, 2015).

Another organisational benefit of Green HRM is cost savings through resource efficiency. Green HRM practices often involve initiatives aimed at reducing energy consumption, minimising waste generation, and promoting the efficient use of resources (Kim, Kim, Choi & Phetvaroon, 2019). These initiatives can lead to significant cost savings for organisations in the long run. Furthermore, by minimising waste and reducing their environmental footprint, organisations can also avoid potential fines and penalties associated with environmental non-compliance.

From an environmental perspective, Green HRM plays a crucial role in reducing an organisation's environmental footprint (Tuul & Bing 2020). By implementing green HR practices, organisations can minimise their impact on the environment through reduced energy consumption, decreased waste generation, and the promotion of sustainable practices throughout the organisation. This can contribute to

mitigating climate change, conserving natural resources, and protecting ecosystems. Furthermore, Green HRM can also encourage employees to adopt more sustainable lifestyles both at work and at home, extending the positive impact beyond the workplace.

Challenges in Implementation

Implementing Green HRM initiatives can be challenging, and organisations often encounter various obstacles in their pursuit of sustainability. One significant challenge is the lack of awareness and understanding of Green HRM among both HR professionals and employees (Mello, 2019). Many HR practitioners may not be fully equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to integrate sustainability into HR practices. Similarly, employees may not be fully aware of the importance of sustainability or how they can contribute to the organisation's green initiatives. This lack of awareness can hinder the effective implementation of Green HRM programmes, as both HR professionals and employees may be resistant to change or lack the necessary expertise (Chandra, 2023).

Another challenge lies in measuring the effectiveness of Green HRM initiatives. While it is relatively easy to measure traditional HR metrics such as employee turnover or training costs, measuring the impact of Green HRM on environmental performance can be more complex (Chandra, 2023; Renwick, 2021). Organisations may struggle to identify appropriate metrics to track their progress in achieving sustainability goals. Furthermore, it can be difficult to isolate the impact of Green HRM from other factors that may influence environmental performance. Developing robust measurement frameworks and establishing clear metrics are essential for demonstrating the value of Green HRM initiatives and ensuring accountability.

Future Research Directions

This exploration of Green HRM has primarily focused on conceptual foundations, examining the evolution of the field, its theoretical underpinnings, core practices like green recruitment and training, and the benefits and challenges associated with its implementation. While this conceptual grounding is essential, it lays the groundwork for more empirical investigations into the practical application and impact of Green HRM. The evolving landscape of business and environmental concerns necessitates a continuous examination of Green HRM to ensure its relevance and effectiveness in promoting both organisational and environmental sustainability.

Several emerging trends are shaping the future of Green HRM. Increased digitalisation and the rise of remote work are creating new opportunities for implementing green practices, such as virtual meetings to reduce travel and digitalising HR processes to minimise paper usage (Chandra, 2023; Eurofund, 2020; Popovicki, 2020). Furthermore, the growing emphasis on employee well-being and social responsibility is pushing organisations to integrate these aspects into their Green HRM strategies (Popovicki, 2020). This includes initiatives such as promoting work-life balance, supporting employee volunteerism in environmental projects, and creating inclusive workplaces that value diversity and social justice alongside environmental sustainability (Popovicki, 2020; Tuul & Bing, 2020). The integration of technology, well-being, and social responsibility into Green HRM represents a significant shift and warrants further investigation.

Several areas emerge as promising avenues for future research. Empirical studies examining the direct link between Green HRM practices and organisational performance, including both financial and environmental

outcomes, are needed. Research exploring the effectiveness of different Green HRM interventions in various organisational contexts, such as small and medium-sized enterprises versus multinational corporations, would also be valuable. Furthermore, investigating the role of leadership in driving Green HRM initiatives and fostering a culture of sustainability within organisations is crucial. Finally, exploring the impact of Green HRM on employee engagement, motivation, and pro-environmental behavior could provide insights into how to maximise the effectiveness of these practices.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Green HRM has thus evolved from a peripheral concern to a strategic imperative for organisations seeking to achieve both business success and environmental sustainability. This exploration has highlighted the key concepts, practices, benefits, and challenges associated with Green HRM. Emerging trends, such as digitalisation, well-being, and social responsibility, are shaping the future of the field and creating new opportunities for research and practice. Therefore, Green HRM is not merely a set of isolated practices but a holistic approach that integrates sustainability into all aspects of human resource management. By embracing Green HRM, organisations can attract and retain talent, improve their environmental performance, enhance their reputation, and contribute to a more sustainable future. Continued research and practical application of Green HRM principles are essential for ensuring that organisations can effectively address the environmental challenges of our time while achieving their business objectives.

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