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**Samuel S Mitra**  
Staff and Researcher in  
Commerce, St. Xavier's College  
Autonomous, Kolkata, West  
Bengal, India

**Aparajita Hembrom**  
Assistant Professor in  
Management, Department of  
Commerce (Evening) &  
Research, Scholar in  
Commerce, St. Xavier's College  
Autonomous, Kolkata, West  
Bengal, India

**Corresponding Author:**  
**Aparajita Hembrom**  
Assistant Professor in  
Management, Department of  
Commerce (Evening) &  
Research, Scholar in  
Commerce, St. Xavier's College  
Autonomous, Kolkata, West  
Bengal, India

## Green HRM-The impetus to organizational and environmental sustainability

**Samuel S Mitra and Aparajita Hembrom**

### Abstract

The astounding growth and development of organizations worldwide has been quite uncanny. The rapid changes percolating in an organization's HR practices with each passing day has called for an urgent need on the organization's think tank to revise their HR policies and practices. As witnessed in the past few years, the management of organizations have undergone wholesome changes with focus shifting from just shareholder's return, profits and better performance to include to noble concepts of environmental sustainability. In this light, Green HRM has become a crux business strategy to provoke green behaviour by employees at the workplace as well as to address corporate environmental sustainability. It is fast gaining attention and large scale applications to ameliorate corporate environmental performance. This research study intends to find out the relationship between Green HRM and Organizational Sustainability which could achieve the sustainability of the environment.

**Keywords:** Sustainability; Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR); Green HRM; Green HRM Dimensions; Green HRM practices

### Introduction

#### Background of the study

The aura swirling the current organizational policies and practices are astoundingly contradicting if we trace back to the yesteryears where corporate success was a measure of economic performance of an organization and greater emphasis was laid on organizational performance. In the present era, economic and other performances of an organization need to be met along with sustainability like minimization of biological footprints and greater priority given to environmental and social aspects. Carrying on business activities coupled with being socially accountable in philanthropic causes by engaging in ethically oriented practices thereby providing a significant social value and building a positive brand image of the organization is the essence of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Major heavy weight companies like Tata, ITC, Microsoft and many others had already started their respective contributions towards CSR when there were no major regulations or laws related to CSR in existence. In the current scenario, CSR has become almost imperative in all business organizations having a net worth of Rs.500 crore or more. Such organizations believe in giving something substantial in return to the society in particular and natural environment in the general context hence giving birth to Stakeholder's Theory, thus, paving the way for sustainability. In the 21st century world, organizations are practicing Green HRM for the preservation and protection of natural resources by taking environment friendly HR initiatives hence catering to sustainability. Finding out the achievement of sustainability through Green HRM is the objective of our endeavour.

#### Introduction to the study

In the backdrop of the high intensity globalization and rapid developments triggering ramifications, our natural environment has left exposed to prodigious degradation stemming from human exploitation. This has left the environmental activists, corporate hot-shots and other potential stakeholders much to excogitate about. A need for the protection of the natural environment for the current and future generations have become global imperatives. This is where the concept of sustainability has come to forefront. A greater emphasis is now being laid on redefining the activities of an organization by including large scale practices of green behaviour by the employees at the workplace. In order to investigate further into this research study, we shall first need to be aware of two main terms "Sustainability".

“Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)” and “Green HRM” which has been explained in an extremely lucid manner in the paragraphs below.

- **Sustainability**

The term ‘Sustainability’ refers to meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations. It is a concept which is responding to the myriad global challenges addressing relevant global issue like Poverty, Hunger, Education, Sanitation, Clean Environment, etc. This noble concept is the need of the situation to mitigate and prevent any adverse effects on the environment. It is a new trajectory, a spin-off from the traditional process of economic development to be supplanted by the introduction of new methods and techniques including replacing the existing technologies with environment friendly technologies. The 3 basic dimensions of sustainability are protection of the environment and its natural resources (ecology), economic development that is not hindered but bolstered by the effective and efficient use of resources (economic) and improvement in the living conditions of the people/society (social). Truth to be told, sustainability involves quite a complex interaction among the 3 dimensions. There have been quite a few research studies which have proven that corporate sustainability management brings myriad benefits to an organization when focused on creating a harmonious rapport with stakeholders.

- **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)**

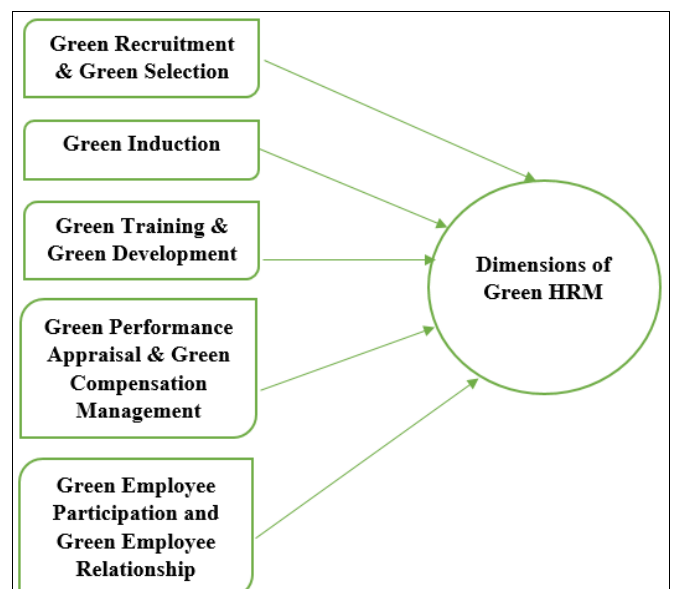
Albeit CSR focusing primarily on organizations, it is strictly connected to sustainability in that CSR is the commitment of the business organizations in contributing to sustainability through coordination and cooperation of employees, local communities and the society at large aimed at improving the quality of life thereby ameliorating both business organizations as well as social developments. In fact this is the definition which has been coined by the World Bank. The definition contained in ISO 26000 Standard also indicates the same where social responsibility is morally binding on the organizations through the impact of its activities on the society and the environment. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a management concept wherein organizations incorporate social and environmental concerns in their activities. It is a way of achieving the 3 dimensions which are termed as ‘Triple Bottom Line’ which constitutes the ecology, economic development and society coupled with persistently addressing the issue of stakeholders. The strategy of CSR constituting respecting the principles of accountability for social, economic and environmental impact of the organization, lucidity of decisions and activities, ethical behaviour, respecting human rights, observance of associated laws and regulations are the hallmarks of sustainability. Needless to say, sustainability has been at the center of management’s attention for more than a decade now. However, it was in the last few years that blending the concept of sustainability with human resource had become a seismic wind of change. It is a no-brainer human resource is the strongest resource available to an organization and it is humans who act as antecedents to ameliorate the environmental efficacy of an organization.

- **Green HRM**

We are all aware of the term “Human Resource Management”, while the concept of Green HRM is a contemporary management construct designed primarily for

triggering employees’ green attitudes and behaviour. This novel concept has started to gather momentum and prodigious interest in the circa of academia within the domain of management for its invaluable contribution to bolster corporate environmental performance and its implicit influence over employee workplace behaviour. It has proven its worth to be a promising management approach to address issues of corporate environmental sustainability. Green HRM involves undertaking HR initiatives which are environment friendly resulting in controlling costs, better engagement of employees, large scale efficacies and employee retention which helps an organization to reduce employee carbon footprints through job-sharing, electronic filing, teleconferencing, telecommuting, energy efficient office equipments, etc. In simple terms, Green HRM can be defined as the use of HRM policies to promote the sustainable use of resources within organizations to promote environmental sustainability. Thus the HR function itself is a nifty driving force through the alignment of HR practices and policies with sustainability. Truth to be told, the implementation of Green HRM actually begins as early as job design and job analysis. Green HRM ensures that even at the time of recruitment in an organization adhering to such HR practices, candidates would be informed about their roles and responsibilities along with substantial attitude and behaviour which are environment friendly. In today’s world of hyperbolic competition, organizations are not only marking themselves as ‘employee-friendly’ but also as ‘environment-friendly.’ Furthermore in various HR processes like pre-screening tests, interviews, appointment formalities, etc. organizations are practicing green behaviour which is reducing usage of papers, time and travelling, thus, ultimately reducing carbon footprints for both candidates as well as the organization. In fact, in the words of Opatha and Arulrajah, (2014), Green HRM includes various HRM functions ranging from Green Recruitment, Green Selection, Green Induction, Green Training, Green Development, Green Performance Appraisal, Green Compensation Management, Green Employee Discipline Management and Green Employee Relation.

Following is a model depicting the dimensions of Green HRM which has been self-designed by the authors.



**Fig 1:** Dimensions of Green HRM

Some organizations are nowadays adhering to corporate environmental performance standards like waste management, waste recycling, use of renewable energy on premises, teleconferencing and environmental audits with an aim of successfully gauging environmental performance standards and developing green information system and audits to have a greater insight into managerial environmental performance.

### Objectives of the study

1. To find out the relationship between Green HRM and Organizational Sustainability
2. To highlight few Green HR initiatives taken by organizations and suggest few Green HRM measures

### Green HRM and organizational sustainability

Adopting and implementing the concept of Green HRM to achieve organizational sustainability is however no easy. It calls for an arduous task on the part of the employees and the organization in the broader context. Blending the idea of organizational sustainability with specific employee job description and job analysis enables an organization to bring environmental strategies into regular processes of development and production aimed at waste management ad reduction and creating a general awareness among employees that their activities could promote sustainable use of resources aimed at bringing organizational sustainability. Standards set by the top level management could lead to the expected behaviour by the employees in adherence to sustainability of the organization and the environment in the long haul. Thus, we see how organizations can achieve sustainability of itself and the environment when each and every individual associated with the organization, the employees of the organization as well as the employers do their activities responsibly and are committed to achieve sustainability in all aspects. Greater awareness is required about issues related to green operations of an organization and the environment. A robust knowledge about one's roles and responsibilities, about the organization, etc. triggers positive attitudes and behaviour from the members of an organization which is instrumental for accomplishing sustainability of the environment. Employee Turnover is a crux predictor of employee commitment to the organization. If employee turnover is low, employee will not leave job and search for other jobs, instead they will channelize precious efforts the organization exemplifying their commitment. This is also a boon for the organization as significant costs incurred in the process of vacancy announcements, recruitment, training and developments are saved. Substantial efforts could be made to reduce wastage of resources like papers, electricity and other materials in the process of training and development by implementing new innovative techniques. A close rapport between employees and the organization like employee participation in management if not face to face then via teleconferencing, video calling, etc. are also significant as it keeps the employees motivated as they feel they are highly valued and appreciated by the organization.

### Literature Review

According to Ahi and Searcy (2013) <sup>[1]</sup>, “the areas linked to both sustainability are Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), voluntary focuses, social, economic and environmental factors.” According to them talking in the context of corporates, sustainability emphasize on Triple Bottom Line approach and acknowledges the long term objectives of the firm and its stakeholders' needs. Sustainability is becoming more challenging as it is gaining more significance every day and also because it is a multi-dimensional topic (Langer and Schon, 2003) <sup>[2]</sup>. According to Hart (1997) and Lin *et al.* (2001) <sup>[3]</sup>, “organizations are persistently on the lookout for developing innovative tools and practices of environmental management which will prodigiously impact sustainability of the organization and promote an aura of competitive.” Green Human Resource Management involves an effective integration of the objectives of organizational environmental management to the various processes of HRM for environment sustainability (Renwick *et al.* 2008 and Muller-Carmen *et al.* 2010) <sup>[4]</sup>. According to Callenbach *et al.* (1993) <sup>[5]</sup> “in order to carry out green human resource management, employees must be inspired, empowered and environmentally made aware of greening to be successful.” A similar study by them in the same year highlights the need for technical as well as managerial skill among employees for implementation of the green initiatives for the preservation and conservation of the natural resources for the organizational sustainability. Nijhawan Geetu, (2014) <sup>[6]</sup>, in her study found out that eco-friendly HR initiatives result in greater efficiencies, lower costs, better employee engagement and retention thereby helping to build competitive advantages and organizational sustainability by reducing carbon footprints. In the words of Jain, (2015) <sup>[7]</sup>, “the Green HRM practices will become important driver for environment sustainability within the organisation by aligning its practices and policies with organisational sustainability goal reflecting towards eco-focus.” Mesmer-Magnus *et al.* (2012) <sup>[8]</sup>, in their study discussed about the organizations can achieve organizational sustainability as well as environmental sustainability both at the same time if the individuals, employees and organization are committed. Hansa *et al.* (2008) <sup>[9]</sup>, that a general awareness about the environmental issues and individuals' attitudes and behaviour plays a pivotal role for pro-environmental actions. An innuendo of the study by Saks *et al.* (2007) <sup>[10]</sup>, deliberated high employee turnover leading employees to seek new job opportunities and leave the organization resulting in considerable expenditure incurred on training and development and other HR functions. In the words of Rettab *et al.* (2009) <sup>[11]</sup>, “employees who are committed to the organization will add value to both organizational as well as environmental sustainability.”

The above model is an adaptation from the International Conference on Sociality and Economics Development held in Singapore in the year 2011. The model depicts the relationship between Green HRM and Organizational Sustainability.



**Fig 2:** Model of Green HRM and Organizational Sustainability (Image Source: International Conference on Sociality and Economics Development, Singapore, 2011)

### Green HR initiatives by few companies and steps for practicing Green HRM

There are a few renowned companies which have implemented Green HRM in their operations. General Electric's 'Six Sigma' technique is used to optimize operations to bolster environmental and societal outcomes thereby increasing overall performance. Google uses 'Green Recruiting' technique with the belief that the strategy would allure most talented employees. Infosys uses its eye-catching 'E-Recruiting' staffing solution. Hewlett Packard uses 'Take-Back', 'Green Packing' and 'Integrating Design' technique for better meeting environmental sustainability and organizational sustenance through such Green HRM initiatives.

In this hyper-competitive business milieu, organizations are fast emerging as antecedents of rapid changes. Myriad activities of an organization have an impact on the society as well as the environment. Keeping this in mind, organization these days are resorting to green HRM techniques which help them to achieve organizational objectives together being eco-friendly to the environment. The HR functions of an organization can become a nifty driving force of environmental sustainability by aligning green practices and policies. Nowadays, companies are also implementing EMS (Environmental Management System) which is a crux tool for gaining competitive advantage simultaneously better controlling organization's environmental impacts.

Listed below are certain examples which organizations may take up to practice Green HRM:

1. Efficient Power Saving
2. Conducting environmental audit
3. Conducting Go-Green or environmental surveys
4. Resorting to paperless activities like software, apps and

e-HR

5. Reuse and Recycling
6. Reducing travelling activities and supplanting it with teleconferencing
7. Saving water
8. Exploring opportunities for the implementation of alternative energy sources.

### Conclusion

It is a no-brainer that Green HRM is a human resource strategy supporting pro-environmental corporate management. It is also an effective tool for increasing competitiveness. Truth to be told, Green HRM is still at a nascent stage in a developing country like India. Albeit this, we have witnessed several organizations engaging themselves in policies and practices that support environmental sustainability. More awareness among employees and the society is the need of the situation in order to explain the benefits of such HRM policies and practices. It is absolutely imperative to implement Green HRM functions in the organizations for the betterment of all our future. Employee Involvement and Employee Participation is also instrumental in bolstering environmental sustainability by focusing on a plethora of Green HRM practices, thereby, adding value to the brand image of the organization and accomplishing environmental sustainability in the long haul. This will also create a sense of morale and loyalty towards the organization resulting to sustainability of the organization as well helps in reducing employee turnover. The future of Green HRM looks extremely promising in India and on other nations keeping in mind its impregnable role in bringing sustainability to the organizations and environment. Albeit there are limited research studies related to this topic as far as to the concern

of Indian organizations though the domain of academia can contribute to a wholesome extent carrying further the research on this topic.

### Managerial Implications

Green HRM has a very bright future. As mentioned earlier in this present research study some innovative eye-twitching initiatives which can be taken by the organizations. HR systems like e-HR can be introduced by to give assistance to the management of the organization and employees in tracking their own carbon emissions. Various essential environmental criterions need to be integrated into the process of staff appraisal thereby paving a way for a learning culture in Environmental Management. Individual employees can also fetch their respective alluring thoughts and ideas related to Green HRM. These thoughts and ideas can be further brainstormed collectively to be included in the goals and objectives of the organization. All HR functions in the organization should address full array of social as well as environmental issues in all levels. Employees should be made aware of the societal and environmental well-being they are expected to achieve through Green HRM. Furthermore, Green HRM could also be linked to the compensation system by introducing a variable pay constituent where pay could be directly linked to eco-performance. This will motivate the employees do achieve better results in achieving sustainability through green practices. Organizations are expected to get a whole lot of benefit from such policies and practices Green HRM aimed at achieving organizational as well as environmental sustainability.

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