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Driving forward green human resource management in India: A framework for sustainable organizational development

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# Driving forward green human resource management in India

## *A framework for sustainable organizational development*

**B**usiness organizations across our resource-scarce planet are under increasing pressure to adopt environmentally sustainable practices, such as recycling and saving energy, and India is no exception. In the under-researched area of green human resource management (HRM), HR professionals report that they lack a formal remit from senior leaders to drive this agenda forward. HR is motivated to act because formalized and sophisticated green HRM practices, when embedded into organizational culture, add value by creating extra commercial strength.

A research paper by [Mishra \(2017\)](#) reveals how green HRM practices are becoming integrated into business operations in India's emerging economy, as well as focusing on what can extend these practices to increase the sustainable element of an organization's development. In addition to a literature review, 16 HR professionals were interviewed from six manufacturing organizations in India – companies that rely on using natural resources.

### Settling into green HRM practices

Green HRM maps out the proactive journey of promoting green behavior through tailoring the practices, systems, and policies of organizations in ways that benefit the environment and, in turn, society. This issue has positive significance for organizations since green HRM practices possess the power to pump out a feel-good factor into the marketplace, elevating an organization's image in the eyes of job candidates and customers. Indeed, a survey by jobsite MonsterTRAK.com revealed how ninety-two percent of candidates feel drawn to employers with green credentials.

The following results for the Indian manufacturers were revealed after evaluations of their green HRM practices across key HR categories:

- Recruitment and selection can become greener by limiting paper use through a focus on recruiting online, which all six Indian companies did. Then recruiting candidates who display environmentally friendly values means they will be more eager to participate in green operational practices; none of the six companies integrated this kind of probing into their interviews however.
- Environmental training and learning had been delivered formally by three of the six companies, to boost green awareness across management teams. At a lower commitment level all six companies used informal briefing methods, such as posters reminding people to turn appliances off, to promote green practices.
- Green performance management was used by every company only to the basic extent of measuring amounts of raw material wasted by individuals. No key performance

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indicators were used by any of the companies to measure overall green behaviors during staff appraisals.

- Green rewards and benefits – all six companies felt they rewarded employees for being green through their appraisal, however any financial compensation was actually linked to costs an employee saved by carefully maintaining machines. Wider green activity, such as employees planting trees, was celebrated with inclusion in the staff magazine at one company.

Other recorded measures include that HR teams from all six companies implemented corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities focused on either environmental or social causes. Green printing was also deployed by the majority, by placing employee handbooks on online portals and using email signatures that encourage less printing. All six companies recycled paper, yet none of the six recorded their paper usage levels.

### An intervention framework to overcome success barriers

The six Indian manufacturers interviewed remain early in their development toward becoming sustainable organizations. Yet although they have a long way to go, their people's willingness to engage in green practices is evident. The key to success in building sustainable organizations is to embed this ethos in the culture, using many inputs for the green message as a way to integrate groups of people. A structure designed to facilitate a sustainable culture strategically combines green CSR activity, green HRM practices, and green supply chain management into a linked system – one that is harmoniously recognized across departments and sets the organization apart to receive a green competitive advantage.

HR professionals are optimally placed to be given the remit to promote sustainable practices throughout their organization, however there is an initial barrier to progress. Just one of the six manufacturer HR teams reported feeling confident in the senior leadership being behind them in rolling out green people practices. The frustration of HR professionals not being given a fully management-backed remit to pursue these worthy goals was clear, as this lack of permission was stalling the progress of potential positive new initiatives. For example, of the two in six Indian manufacturers who sought employee feedback about how to become greener, only one employer responded to a suggestion, which was to start a bicycle club. However, action to implement this suggestion had stalled, as it was awaiting a management decision. One way HR professionals could help overcome this top-management inertia is to lobby conference organizers, for example, to invite speakers on the commercial advantages of building sustainable organizations.

### The green road to competitive advantage

To enjoy the benefits of achieving a green organizational status, the initial priority is for HR to gain the empowerment of management support, so that HR and the leadership team consistently lead by example. The second stage is to improve the organization's green credentials by implementing these core green culture-sustaining HRM practices:

- investment in formal education programs to train employees in positive green behaviors by raising their environmental awareness, for example, by building this into induction processes;
- a green performance measure on appraisals to emphasize and evaluate this element of expected employee behavior;
- both financial and non-financial rewards for green behavior;
- green-focused candidate selection by referencing green values in job adverts and probing around them in interviews;
- designating eco-intrapreneurs within teams to inspire green efforts;
- cafeteria operations that are eco-friendly; and
- an ongoing commitment to measuring and evaluating the effectiveness of these practices, while acting on employee feedback.

Actively executing these measures is likely to produce a more integrated, harmonious, and engaged organization with an elevated reputation in the market. By scaling up their sustainable practices, the positive magnetic effects of new talent and customers taking notice can be accessed by any organization. Crucially, those seeking a competitive edge must first sharpen it with credibility.

### Commentary

The review is based on “Green human resource management: A framework for sustainable organizational development in an emerging economy” by Mishra (2017), published in the *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*. This research paper concentrates on the developing green HRM practices of Indian manufacturers, and how deepening and widening these can boost competitive advantage. A framework of key interventions includes creating a harmony of wider corporate practices that all teams can recognize as belonging within the organization’s cultural core.

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advantage,  
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### Reference

Mishra, P. (2017), “Green human resource management: a framework for sustainable organizational development in an emerging economy”, *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, Vol. 25 No. 5, pp. 762-788, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJOA-11-2016-1079>

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