

## Ensuring Responsible and Sustainable Business Conduct through Green HRM: A Study of Indian Perspective

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### Abstract

Green Human Resource Management (HRM) is one of the key components of holistic business management strategies that can help businesses in achieving their environment-related objectives as a part of corporate sustainability and hence is relevant and important to understand. This paper makes an attempt to provide a brief but comprehensive insight of the concept of Green HRM and its various aspects and recommends the best possible ways to align HR Practices with coveted sustainable responsible business conduct. This research focuses on the Indian perspective of Green HRM. This research employs an extensive review of relevant literature using archival method along with real– life instances of Green HRM practices of Indian companies. Green HRM was noted to have a scope of helping to bring a change in the organisation to help achieve its environmental-related objectives. In addition, it was noted that businesses in India have implemented Green HRM practices in various ways. Green HRM is a highly relevant for businesses with a growing concern for the environment and sustainability..

**Keywords:** Green Human Resource Management, Corporate Sustainability, Responsible Business Conduct, NGRBC, GHRM

### 1. Background

Responsible Business Conduct is a global phenomenon based on the notion that business enterprises can perform efficiently and effectively when engaged in invigorating the society from which they receive resources for production. The National Guidelines on Responsible Business Conduct, 2018 (NGRBC), which is regarded as an improvement over the prevailing National Voluntary Guidelines (NVGs) on Social, Environmental & Economic Responsibilities of Business, 2011, are basically means of prodding businesses to contribute towards broad development goals while keeping an eye on maximizing their profits. The NGRBC is beautifully linked with UNGPs -The United Nations Guiding Principles on Business & Human Rights and SDGs -Sustainable Development Goals.

The NGRBC not only expects companies to be more responsible and accountable but also envisages creating a complete ecosystem to 'Protect', 'Respect' & 'Remedy' as envisioned in the UNGPs.

The rich value system of giving back to the society has been an integral part of our Indian culture, which has also been imbibed in traditional Indian businesses since long. In order to assimilate this practice into the core business philosophy, the Government has obligated companies to take responsibility for society by incorporating it as part of the fiduciary duties of a director.

The NGRBC articulated as a set of nine principles and their associated core elements pronounce the thrust of the United Nation Guiding Principles (UNGPs) on Business and Human Rights and Sustainable Development Goals and yet remain true and specific to the Indian context. Out of Nine NGRBCs, Guideline numbered as 6 stating that "Businesses should respect and make efforts to protect and restore the environment."

This principal advocate that for sustainable economic growth and well-being of society, environmental responsibility is a pre-requisite.

This Principle emphasizes that environmental issues are interconnected at local, regional, and global levels. This trait of interconnectivity makes it imperative for business enterprises to address issues like pollution, sustainable use of natural resources, and climate change in a just, comprehensive, and systematic manner. These are also aligned with SDGs no 11, 13, 14, and 15.

The Principle also encourages businesses to assess the environmental impacts of not only their products but also the operations and take corrective steps to either eliminate it or the circumstances where these cannot be avoided, make efforts to minimize and mitigate the adverse impacts.

*If we cast our eyes upon the core elements of guideline no 6 related to sustainability, it states that :*

"Businesses should seek to improve their environmental performance by adopting innovative, resource-efficient and low-carbon technologies and solutions resulting in lower resource footprint, lesser material consumption and more positive impact on environment, economy, and society." (Ministry of Corporate Affairs Government of India, 2018)

#### **Rising Global Concern for the Environment: Perspectives from Different Researches:**

There is a growing global concern for the environment over the years and there is also immense pressure for businesses to make their business operations more efficient and to prevent damage to the environment. (Ahmad, 2015)

People in multiple regions across the globe are facing numerous environmental and social issues and challenges such as the problems of the degradation and overuse of the natural resources, poverty and poor living conditions of people, prevalence of pollution, climate change, etc. and there is an urgent need for nations to address these concerns.

These issues and challenges have highlighted the need and importance for the nations across the world to engage in economic development that is sustainable in its nature and this growing global concern of engaging in sustainable development is further indicated by the adoption of the resolution named the "2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" in the year 2015 by the United Nations (UN) and its member countries, and this resolution consists of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that are targeted to be achieved by 2030, and include the goals for eliminating poverty, engaging in responsible consumption and production, taking action against climate change, etc. for the achievement of sustainable development. (United Nations, n.d) Businesses have a crucial and relevant role to play in this to bring about sustainable development and help in the achievement of the SDGs by considering and reducing the negative impacts of their operations on the environment and society, and many businesses have been influenced by this and have begun to engage in a variety of efforts to make their business operations more sustainable and to lessen their negative effects on the environment.

Businesses are increasingly considering the various concerns related to the society and environment and incorporating a variety of measures to address them, in addition to the consideration of the economic aspects of the business as a part of corporate sustainability.

Corporate sustainability is the attempt of a business to positively impact the environment and society through their business strategy and this concept is gaining focus with an increasing number of businesses integrating the objective of sustainability in the various policies and practices to make their overall businesses more sustainable. (Spiliakos, 2018)

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Corporate sustainability has the potential to bring multiple benefits to business organizations, as indicated by both research and the actual experiences of businesses, and these benefits can include the improvement of the financial performance of the business or the creation of a competitive advantage. (Whelan and Fink, 2016)

In India, in tune with the increasing global focus on corporate sustainability and the various emerging concerns including the need for sustainable development, the Government of India has framed the National Guidelines on Responsible Business Conduct (NGRBC) to facilitate and guide all types of business organizations in India to take further responsible measures beyond the minimum prescribed requirements of law and for this, it has provided various principals based on the SDGs, such as to provide goods and services in a sustainable manner and protect the environment. (Ministry of Corporate Affairs, Government of India, 2018)

Hence, there has been a significant impetus for businesses in recent times to consider the various concerns for the environment and consider the aspect of sustainability in their strategies and the Human Resource (HR) function of businesses can also play an important role in this endeavour by incorporating the environment-related objectives in the various aspects of Human Resource Management (HRM) by Green Human Resource Management (Green HRM). (Mishra, Sarkar & Kiranmai, 2014)

In this background, it becomes imperative for business enterprises to ensure the reflection of responsible business conduct in each and every aspect of their operations. Given the significance and relevance of human resource management in contemporary times, it is important for HR managers to not only offer a better understanding of the overall concept of Green HRM to ensure sustainable work culture in the organisation but also implement the same in true spirit.

### 2. Research Methodology

#### Objective of the Study:

The objectives of the present study are:

- a) To discuss the relevance of the very concept of Green HRM as a tool for ensuring responsible and sustainable business conduct in the light of National Guidelines on Responsible Business Conduct (NGRBC).
- b) To offer a better understanding of Green HRM with relevant instances from India Inc.
- c) To recommend the best possible ways to align HR Practices with coveted sustainable responsible business conduct.

#### Methodology:

In order to achieve the aforementioned objective (s), an extensive review of relevant literature has been conducted using archival method deploying various databases for identification and collection of variables.

Additionally, in order to provide the real– life instances of Green HRM from Indian companies, the annual reports and websites of select Indian companies have also been referred.

### 3. Review Of Relevant Literature

HRM involves various functions, the recruitment of new employees, training of the employees, formulation of appropriate compensation policies, selection and implementation of a requisite performance appraisal process etc. There is a possibility of integrating a number of HR functions with the overall objective of making the business operations more sustainable.

The concept of Green HRM involves the assimilation of the environmental-related objectives of a business with the various functions of HRM. Green HRM includes the environmental-related aspects of overall sustainability objectives and thus may be considered as part of the wider concept of Sustainable Human Resource Management. (Saifulina, Carballo-Penela, Ruzo-Sanmartín, 2020)

If we talk about implementing the concept of Green HRM in Business enterprises, it can be implemented in a variety of ways, for instance, some companies have included rewards to encourage employees to develop products or processes that are friendly to the environment as a part of the reward management function of HR or by developing appropriate induction programs for new employees to ensure that they understand the green objectives of the business. (Arulrajah, Opatha and Nawaratne, 2015)

Green HRM encourages employees to behave in a manner that is more congenial to the environment. For example, by actively encouraging employees to involve themselves to take an initiative on their own and give recommendations to the business and further strengthen the achievement of the various environment-related

objectives or practice routine task to ensure the sustainable use of resources, etc. (Saifulina, Carballo-Penela, Ruzo-Sanmartín, 2020)

It is noted that Green HRM includes integrating the objective of making an organization greener by formulating various suitable HR policies and processes; by having employees who understand the need and importance of this objective and assist the business organization to achieve its environment-related goals. They also elucidate that Green HRM can be pursued in ways by integrating it in the various HR functions such as by Green Recruitment, Green Performance Management, etc along with initiatives such as reducing paper usage in offices, introducing and encouraging energy conservation, and waste management, etc.(Ahmad,2015)

Obaid and Alias(2015) analyzed the influence of Green HRM processes including Green recruitment, training, etc through literature, and concluded that Green HRM helps a business organization to better achieve its green objectives, which else may be difficult to achieve.

Organizations may engage in green job design to include the environmental-related concerns in the descriptions of a variety of jobs and ensure inclusion of the environment-related aspects in job responsibilities. (Arulrajah, Opatha and Nawaratne, 2015).

Organizations may implement green recruiting(Ahmad, 2015; Arulrajah, Opatha and Nawaratne, 2015) measures such as paperless recruiting processes, inclusion of green-terms to describe jobs, displaying information related to environmental protection on website, social media etc. for dissemination of information to various people including job seekers etc to both help attract the increasingly growing base of job-seekers concerned with the environmental aspects of their potential employer and recruit candidates who will be effective to help the organization in achieving its objectives including those related to the environment. (Aranganathan, 2018) In addition, measures may be taken for providing green induction programs to provide awareness to the newly recruited employee of an organization's environmental aspects (Arulrajah, Opatha and Nawaratne, 2015).

Furthermore, other measures include periodic holding of green training and development programs and inclusion of environmental-related aspects for consideration during employee performance appraisal (Arulrajah, Opatha and Nawaratne, 2015). In addition, all employee training programs of an organisation can also be designed with the use environmental-friendly practices such as the use of digital technologies to avoid the wastage of paper. (Deshwal, 2015)

In addition, the organisation can attempt the formulation of a bonus policy and other measures for green compensation to encourage and incentivize employees to contribute towards the green objectives of the organization etc. (Ahmad, 2015)

This can help provide monetary or non-monetary extrinsic reward to those employees who will be motivated by this incentive; however, this can reduce the natural intrinsic motivation of employees and hence has to evaluate appropriately by an organisation considering to implement this. (Leidner, Baden & Ashleigh, 2018)

Yusoff et al (2018) studied the relationship between Green HRM and the environmental performance of businesses in the Hotel industry in Malaysia. They found that certain green HRM practices such as green recruitment, training, compensation, etc. help the firm to perform better in achieving its green objectives. However, they did not find a significant relationship between this and the practice of green performance appraisal.

Bombiak and Marciniuk-Kluska. (2018) analyzed the Green HRM practices of businesses in Poland that were running operations for a maximum of 3 years regarding their influence on sustainable development by the business and its implementation and a positive correlation was established in this regard. They noted that the main hindrance in the adoption of Green HRM is the lack of the manager's awareness of the Green HRM concepts.

Zubair and Khan (2019) analyzed the various ways that Green HRM practices could be incorporated in the various HR functions and also noted that this is not too complex nor divergent from the existing framework of the HRM functions of a business for adoption by them, but can still have a significant positive impact on the business, especially when integrated as a component of an overall broad business effort towards sustainability, rather than its use only as occasional independent small-scale measures.

Mishra, Sarkar, and Kiranmai (2014) analyzed the Green HRM practices by public sector companies in India through a survey of certain employees in these companies. They found that there was little focus on green HRM by the companies, though, there was an agreement on the importance of green practices and operations by the businesses and the need of engaging the employees in this endeavour.

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The practices and policies of HR in business enterprises aspire to promote and achieve the environment-related objectives. For this purpose, some of these businesses include green training, use of online-based communication tools to reduce business travel, reduced printing on paper, etc. They also suggested various Green HRM policies that can be practiced by such companies and some of these include encouraging more environment-friendly methods of commuting to work such as car-pooling, adoption of waste management and energy conservation policies, the inclusion of rewards for the units or employees for contributing to certain environment-related objectives, etc.

Chaudhary (2019) studied the practice of Green HRM in the automobile industry of India by a survey of various employees. They found that Green HRM practices were not commonly adopted by the business organizations in the industry, and among them, the relatively the most common way of implementing measures included green training. Nevertheless, they found that Green HRM measures have a significant positive relationship with the employees exhibiting green-related behaviours.

*Different parameters of researches conducted in the area of sustainability & Green HRM along with different ways of greening HR practices may be summarised as per the followings: (Please Refer to Table -1 & 2)*

**Table I**

Parameters /Dimensions of Research Conducted in the Area of Sustainability and Green Human Resource Management: Literature Review at a Glance

<b>Parameter (s) of Sustainability and Greening of Human Resource Practices</b>	<b>Name of the Author</b>	<b>Year of the Study</b>
Green HRM practices by public sector companies in India. Human Resource function of businesses can play an important role in the endeavour of sustainability by incorporating the environment-related objectives in its various aspects through Green Human Resource Management	Mishra, Sarkar & Kiranmai	2014
Businesses to make their operations more efficient and prevent damage to the environment	Ahmad	2015
Variety of Ways to implement the concept of Green HRM	Arulrajah, Opatha and Nawaratne	2015
Organizations may use engagement in green job design to include the environmental-related concerns	Arulrajah, Opatha and Nawaratne,	2015
Designing of training programs by incorporating environmental-friendly practices	Deshwal	2015
Corporate sustainability has the potential to bring multiple benefits to business organization.	Whelan and Fink	2016
Analysis of the influence of Green HRM Processes	Obaid and Alias	2015
Monetary or non-monetary extrinsic reward to the employees working for sustainability	Leidner, Baden & Ashleigh	2018
Analysis of Green HRM practices of businesses in Poland and their influence on sustainable development	Bombiak and Marciniuk-Kluska	2018
HR Practices as tool to achieve green objectives of the organisation	Yusoff et.al	2018
Analysis of various ways in which	Zubair and Khan	2019

Green HRM practices could be incorporated in the various HR functions		
Practice of Green HRM in the automobile industry of India	Chaudhary	2019
Environment-related aspects of sustainability as Key Components of Green HRM	Saifulina, Carballo-Penela, Ruzo-Sanmartín,	2020
Employee Engagement-Expectation of Green HRM from workforce	Saifulina, Carballo-Penela, Ruzo-Sanmartín	2020

*Source: Extensive Review of Literature under Archival Method*

**Table II**

Ways to Green Human Resource Management Practices: Dimensions and Magnitude

Ways to implement Green HRM	Dimension & Magnitude	Year and Author
Greening of Recruitment & Selection Process	Paper-less recruitment Process Giving weightage to candidate's concern towards environment	Ahmad 2015 Arulrajah, Opatha & Nawaratne 2015
Motivation of Employees & Compensation Management	Rewarding and incentivising Workforce for their Contribution towards sustainability.	Ahmad 2015 Leidner, Baden & Ashleigh 2018
Job Design and Description	Incorporating environment related concern in variety of jobs &  Ensure Environment –related aspect in job responsibilities.  Incorporating the dimension of Environmental concern as a duty in job description.	Arulrajah, Opatha & Nawaratne - 2015 Opatha 2013
Induction Programmes	Sensitizing newly recruited employees about the environmental aspect of the organisation.	Aranganathan 2018
Training & Development Programmes	Green Training & Development Programmes by following eco-friendly practices like use of Digital Technologies.	Deshwal 2015 Arulrajah, Opatha & Nawaratne - 2015
Performance Appraisal	Integrating the green criteria in evaluation process of employees' job performance.  Adding a separate element for progress on greening in the performance feedback interview	Opatha, 2013
Organisational Culture and Behavioural Aspect of Workforce	Encouraging Employees to involve themselves in taking green initiatives Recommendation of employees to business and strengthen the environment-related aspects.	Saifulina, Carballo-Penela, Ruzo-Sanmartín -2020

*Source: Extensive Review of Literature under Archival Method*

#### **Instances of Green Human Resource Management Practices (Green HRM) from India Inc.:**

Indicative of the relevance and importance of Green HRM practices in contemporary businesses, several corporate entities operating in India have initiated greening of their HR practices. Some of them have avidly mentioned and highlighted certain practices on their respective websites whereas some others have incorporated the same in their sustainability reports as a part of their Annual Reports.

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In order to provide the instances of real-life implementation of Green HRM practices, some of the examples of practices adopted and implemented by Indian Companies related to Green HRM in the recent past are stated as follows:

1. **Greening of HR Practices by Sensitizing the Workforce about Environmental Concerns and urging for the engagement of workforce for the same :** Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) has stated in their sustainability report 2018-19 that they conducted campaigns for their employees for them to understand environmental issues and the need for conserving the environment and resources. Also, they have mentioned engaging employees to assist in achieving their goals related to water conservation, carbon footprint, and their campaign to reduce plastic waste. (TCS, 2018)
2. **Greening of HR by Optimising the Travel of Employees for Official Work to ensure the reduction of emissions:** Wipro Enterprises Private Limited has stated in their sustainability report 2018-19 that they have optimized the travel of their employees for official work to reduce the footprint of emissions and they have also taken various measures to lessen the impact of the employees' daily commute to both home and office such as by encouraging the use of public transport and carpooling. (Wipro, 2019)
3. **Greening of HR by digitisation of task:** HDFC bank has made to shift towards the use of digital technologies to reduce their usage of paper and also tracks and records the individual paper usage statistic of an employee. (HDFC, n.d)
4. **Greening of HR by educating workforce on the issue of sustainability:** State Bank of India (SBI) has stated in its sustainability report 2019-20, that all its employees have to view an online-based tutorial and later take a test on the same material, to educate the them on the topic on the various sustainability issues, United Nations Sustainable Development Goals along with information on the measures they have taken for the sustainability objective. Also, IT technology has been used to store information held by various registers digitally and hence save paper. (SBI,2019)
5. **Conducting Awareness Programs to increase knowledge of workforce on different aspects of environmental conservation :** IndusInd Bank has stated in their sustainability report 2015-16 that they conduct programs to increase the employee's knowledge about aspects of environmental conservation, use IT technology to reduce the usage of paper in various processes along with facilitating virtual communication and collaboration to lessen the travel requirements for official purposes. (IndusInd Bank, 2016)
6. **Introducing Reward System for being Green :** Hindustan Petroleum in their Sustainability Report 2018-19 has stated that have a reward system to recognize the refineries or marketing locations that have a high environmental performance in terms of their energy and water consumption. (Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited, 2019)
7. **By Conducting campaign on the conservation of energy resources :** Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) has stated in its sustainability report 2018-19 that they promote understanding of their water conservation methods to employees along with conducting a campaign on the conservation of energy resources and the need for efficient use amongst the employees. (ONGC, 2019)
8. **Promoting Paperless transactions for going Green :** Axis Bank in its Sustainability Report 2019-2020, has mentioned they have then various steps to promote paperless operations through Information Technology for example, by using e-welcome kits and they also promote digital banking among their employees to assist in the paperless goals. (Axis Bank, 2019)
9. **Participation of Employees in the Events focusing on ways and means to deal with Climate Change:** Larsen and Toubro (L&T) in its Sustainability Report 2017, have stated that their employees participate in various events that help build an understanding of various green measures and the concerns of climate change. (Larsen and Toubro, n.d)
10. **Reducing the use of Paper in operations of the business :** Mahindra & Mahindra Ltd in its Sustainability Report 2018-19, has stated that have reduced the use of paper in their operations and conducted an event on World Environment Day to increase awareness of employees relating to the use of plastics and the environment.

The afore-mentioned instances of Green HRM practices, adopted and implemented by Indian Companies in the recent past is a testimony to the establishment of an organisation culture which ensures that the business acts responsibly. The Green HRM-related practices have been practiced in a variety of ways by multiple business organizations in India and they are observed in a wide array of HR functions ranging from employee training & development programs, performance appraisal, operations of the business and organisation of various programmes to ensure the development and management of human resource in a sustainable manner.

#### 4. Conclusion & Recommendation

In the light of the recent revision of National Voluntary Guidelines on Social, Environmental and Economic Responsibilities of Business, 2011 (NVGs) and formulation of the National Guidelines on Responsible Business Conduct (NGRBC) by Ministry of Corporate Affairs, Government of India, route of sustainability is no more optional for the corporate entities. These guidelines urge business houses to actualise the principles in letter and spirit.

The recommendation and inferences of present study are as follows:

❖ India Inc. will have to realise that Green HR comprises of two essential components viz; HR practices that incorporate aspects of environmental aspects and are green in nature and also the preservation of the knowledge capital (Sharma and Gupta, 2015). It has been observed that most of the corporate entities had successfully implemented the greening of HR practices but somehow greater attention is still needed for better employee engagement and retention.

❖ Green HRM practices are very useful and relevant to make the organisation and their operations green. The green performance, green skills and competencies, green behaviours etc. of the organization's human resources can be shaped through green HRM practices both efficiently and effectively.

❖ Since Green HRM intends to bring metamorphic change in the organisational culture it serves as a very powerful tool for ensuring sustainable and responsible business conduct in a holistic manner.

❖ If implemented in true spirit, Green HRM may act as an agent of change and significantly help improve the corporate image.

❖ Presence of five corporate entities of India viz; Larsen & Toubro, TCS, WIPRO, Essar Oil and Tech-Mahindra among top 187 companies in the global list of green firms in CDP Climate Performance Leadership Index 2014, is a testimony that the philosophy of Green HRM is not at all new to India.

On the basis of the archival analysis of relevant literature and going through the real-life instances of Greening efforts by India Inc, with agility and commitment, it may be inferred that by understanding the relevance and magnitude of green HRM practices, the organizations can improve their performance in a manner which is not only profitable but also sustainable..

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