

# For a Greener Human Resource Management

Yusliza Mohd-Yusoff

**Abstract**—Green Human Resource Management (HRM) has recently attracted the attention of academic researchers and practitioners. In addition, the literature on Green HRM recently focuses upon the emerging economy. Though environmental conscious in Malaysian companies is observed in the literature, their perception towards this new concept is not yet clearly defined. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to highlight the factors that lead the Malaysian large manufacturing firms in Malaysia as an example of an emerging market to practice Green HRM. Role of HR as strategic partner, top management commitment, use of technology in HR, corporate social responsibility, employee empowerment, and human resource competencies are some of the factors highlighted by the HR Directors to influence Green HRM practices.

**Keywords**—Green Human Resource Management, emerging market.

## I. INTRODUCTION

WITH the increase of the awareness on environmental management and sustainable development, Green Human Resource Management (HRM) gained its unique position in research. Green HRM has been risen to combat the debates surrounding business responsibility towards environmental degradation and climate change [1]. Thus, Green HRM is seen as a strategy of the green movements of organizations that aim to environment safety [2]. Renwick, Redman and Maguire [3] view Green HRM as the HRM aspect of environmental management efforts of organization. HRM can be greened by linking environment management practices with all HRM practices – recruitment and selection of talent; compensation and rewards; performance and appraisal; training and development; employment relations and organizational exit [3, 4, 5]. Renwick, Redman, and Maguire [6] find the capability of rigorous recruitment and selection of employees, performance-based appraisal system, training programs to facilitate green management initiatives for fostering environmental innovations. Jabbour et al [4] relate the phases of gradual implementation of environmental management practices with almost all of the functional and competitive dimensions of HRM (recruitment, selection, training, performance evaluation and reward). As such, Green HRM efforts may start with hiring ‘green’ employees, and then may introduce training and development program to develop employees’ skills in environmental management. It is also argued that HRM may have a performance management

systems and appraisals to reward and compensate ‘green’ employees. In addition, Green HRM practices may encourage employee expression of ‘green’ ideas and employee participation in implementing the related green efforts such as keeping workplace green and encouraging CSR.

## II. UNDERSTANDING READINESS FOR GREEN HRM PRACTICES

### A. Strategic Human Resource Role

In an attempt to improve the status of HR profession in the organization, HR managers are seen less concerned for administrative function and more on the achievement of the business goal of the organization. The role of the HR manager as a contributor to business value is viewed as HR strategic or business partner role [7, 8]. As a business partner, HR manager is seen as an internal consultant advising senior management and facilitating major organizational changes which require consideration of key business strategies [9]. Cascio [10] observed that as a business partner role, HR manager must be able to create an overall talent group to achieve business strategy and develop an HR strategy that aligns people, processes, and systems with the strategy of the company. HR professionals exhibit their business partner role by influencing the strategic decision-making process through relating HR strategies to the dominant business values and norms in the organization [11]. In business partner role, HR is expected to implement and deliver HR practices and services that support the organization’s business model and meet the demands of managers and employees [12]. Keegan and Francis [13] model the business partnership by a strong notion of mutuality guided by the belief that managers, employees, consultants and HR professionals work collaboratively within a unitarist framework to achieve high performance levels according to managerially sanctioned business targets. Welch and Welch [14] have named HR ‘business partner’ as advisor or strategic partner since HR manager needs to be involved in the strategy formulation process. Contemporary HRM researchers have seen HR business role as a strategy of HRM to gain place in the organization [15, 16].

### B. Top Management Commitment

Top management commitment refers to the priority top-level managers assign on the development of specific capabilities within the organization [17]. Hence, top management’s green commitment can be seen as a factor that influences the formulation of different types of corporate environmental practices [18]. Researchers have identified the role of top management commitment in different

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environmental issues such as, green marketing [19]; strategy green supply chain management [17, 20, 21] and; green purchasing standards [22]. When top management commitment to the environment is high, organization becomes more responsive to the environment [23]. Top management commitment is a critical factors in environmental management [24] and; successful implementation of environmental sustainability [25]. To ensure environmental excellence, top management must be totally committed [26]. Zhu, Chew, & Spangler [27] found that organizational learning and management support positively affect the implementation of GSCM practices. Senior managers with a positive attitude towards environmental issues will be more likely to adopt Green HRM initiatives [29].

### *C. Electronic Human Resource Management*

With the advancement of information technology, organizations are increasingly adopting IT into their different functions and systems that include enterprise resource planning, supply chain management, marketing, and HRM. Electronic HRM or e-HRM is thus, the result of IT adoption in HRM service process and delivery. Voermans and Van Veldhoven [29] define e-HRM as the administrative support of the HR function in organizations by using Internet technology. Strohmeier [30] defines e-HRM as the process of incorporating IT for both networking and supporting HR actors who share performing HR activities. Bondarouk and Ruel [31] conceptualize e-HRM as “an umbrella term covering all possible integration mechanisms and contents between HRM and Information Technologies aiming at creating value within and across organizations for targeted employees and management”. Researchers have seen the crucial role of e-HRM in the form of virtual access from anywhere and effective development of human capital in the organization [32, 33]; giving competitive advantage to the organization [34]; determining success to Green HRM [35] and; its ability to analyze HR activities and turn these results into information which is useful for organizational effectiveness and innovativeness [36]. Parry and Tyson [37] have shown that organizations adopting e-HRM were successful to improve efficiency, service delivery and standardization of HR operations, provide employees and managers with remote access and ability to perform HR activities themselves and potential improvements in organizational image. Results from a pilot study conducted by Yusliza and Ramayah [38] find that attitude influences intention to use e-HRM technology. In another study, Yusliza and Ramayah [39] found that perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use and user satisfaction are critical to attitude towards using e-HRM, indicating that user training and support are required investments for e-HRM platforms.

### *D. Corporate Social Responsibility*

Because of the increased awareness of business responsibility towards the society, interest in corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become more widespread [40, 41].

CSR is defined as “context-specific organizational actions and policies that take into account stakeholders’ expectations and the triple bottom line of economic, social, and environmental performance” (Aguinis, 2011: 855 as cited in Aguinis & Glavas [42]). With CSR practices, organizations internalize stakeholder preferences about social and environmental concerns and consequently, can improve their profitability by investing in CSR activities [43]. Organizations influence stakeholders by CSR policies and accordingly, get their preferences to invest preferentially in socially and environmentally responsible companies [44]. Indeed, CSR believes that organizations’ competitiveness may depend on maintaining and rewarding relationship with their stakeholders [43, 45]. Through CSR activities, organizations can integrate social–environmental issues with core business activities, and can create an ongoing and open communication with their stakeholders [46, 47, 48] explores how key stakeholders perceive contribution of CSR to welfare and the socio-economic development of communities and sustainable development of the nation.

### *E. Employee Empowerment*

Empowerment is a planned and systematic process of transferring power, authority with responsibility and accountability, to the employees [49]. An employee empowerment approach includes practices that aim at sharing information, rewards, job-related knowledge, and authority with employees is expected to be positively related to performance [50]. Empowered individuals will have a more active role in the organization, will take on initiatives, and their participation in the activities of the organization will be enhanced [51]. Considering the importance of employee participation in environmental management success, the role of empowerment in organizational environmental issues has received significant attention [52, 53]. Environmental empowerment is defined as a process through which an organization’s authority shares its power with employees to address environmental issues [52]. Empowered employees are motivated and committed to participate and engage in good environmental practices [54]. Daily et al [55] found that empowerment for employees were related to environmental performance as mediated through teamwork. Govindarajulu and Daily [56] pointed out that a higher rate of employee involvement in environmental improvement programs is observed when empowered employees enjoy autonomy and decision-making power. Employee empowerment is an enabling factor that impacts green supply chain management implementation [57].

### *F. Human Resource Competencies*

Today HR managers are expected to do more than managing employee terms and conditions. Hence, they need to upgrade themselves to meet the challenges of new expectations from them. For HR professionals to respond to changing business conditions, they must demonstrate new competencies [58, 59]. According to Ulrich and colleagues, HR

competencies define what is expected from those who work in HR and form the basis for assessment and improvement in the quality of HR professionals. The authors arrayed six domains of HR competence, dealing with relationships, processes, and capabilities, and include strategic positioner, credible activist, capability builder, change champion, HR innovator and integrator and technology proponent. Dainty [60] find that Australian HR managers have been encouraged to make a greater strategic contribution to their organizations through achieving competencies in these six competency domains. Reviewing literature on HR competency, McEvoy et al [61] identified key specific elements of competencies which are of direct significance for effectiveness in the HR profession:

1. traits and motives (e.g., conscientiousness, adaptability, proactivity);
2. functional HR knowledge (e.g., staffing, appraisal, compensation, employee relations);
3. functional business knowledge (e.g., accounting, finance, marketing, operations);
4. knowledge and skill in key organizational processes (e.g., change management, facilitation, and OD; leadership; interpersonal, coaching, and team skills; HR research and organization feedback); and
5. knowledge of strategic HR management (e.g., linking HR to business strategy, consulting with executives, seeing and implementing a big picture perspective).

Han et al. [62] specified three competency “domains”—knowledge of business, field expertise, and change management for better understanding of HR competencies. Long et al. [63] reviewed several vital HR competencies in their study that include business knowledge, culture management, effective relationship and HR development skills. Very recently e-HRM is seen a strategic skill that simultaneously helps in reducing environmental waste (e.g., paper, staples, files) and social waste (e.g., process’ time for searching documents and decision making), and economical waste (e.g., cost related with preparing documents, labours’ salary due to extra time of working) of conducting HR’s task [35].

### III. CONCLUSION

This research provides an initial attempt to understand the factors affecting the organization to go Green in HRM by offering the suggestion that strategic HR role, top management commitment, electronic HRM, corporate social responsibility, employee empowerment, and HR competencies are all important and have been stressed by the HR Directors during face to face interview with the researcher. These variables are all important factors of Green HRM. As organizations continue to institute large-scale change in their efforts to remain competitive in an increasingly turbulent business environment, understanding factors contributing to the practice towards greener HRM represents an important avenue for continued research.

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