

## THE IMPACTS OF GREEN HUMAN RESOURCES PRACTICES ON ORGANIZATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY

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**Abstract.** The depletion of natural resources in the world is one of the main problems of our time. The limited nature of these resources and the accompanying ecological problems have made environmental protection and prevention of its pollution a pressing problem. The article examines the practice of green human resources and its effects on the sustainability indicators of companies.

**Keywords:** Green human resources practices, environmental awareness, sustainability performance.

### İNSAN RESURLARININ YAŞIL İDARƏOLUNMASI TƏCRÜBƏSİNİN TƏŞKİLATIN DAYANAQLILIĞINA TƏSİRLƏRİ

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**Xülasə.** Dünyada təbii resursların tükənməsi dövrümüzün əsas problemlərindən biridir. Bu resursların məhdud olması və bununla bərabər yaşanan ekoloji problemlər ətraf mühitin qorunması və onun çirklənməsinin qarşısının alınmasını aktual problemə çevirmişdir. Məqalədə insan resursları “yaşıl idarəolunması” təcrübəsi və onun şirkətlərin davamlılıq göstəricilərinə təsirləri araşdırılmışdır.

**Açar sözlər:** insan resurslarının yaşıl idarəolunması, ekoloji məlumatlılıq, davamlılıq göstəriciləri.

### ВЛИЯНИЕ ПРАКТИКИ ЗЕЛЕННОГО УПРАВЛЕНИЯ ЧЕЛОВЕЧЕСКИМИ РЕСУРСАМИ НА УСТОЙЧИВОСТЬ ОРГАНИЗАЦИЙ

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**Резюме.** Истощение природных ресурсов в мире – одна из главных проблем современности. Ограниченность этих ресурсов и сопутствующие экологические проблемы сделали охрану окружающей среды и предотвращение её загрязнения актуальной задачей. В статье рассматривается практика «зелёного» управления человеческими ресурсами и её влияние на показатели устойчивого развития компаний.

**Ключевые слова:** Зелёное управление человеческими ресурсами, экологическая осведомленность, показатели устойчивого развития.

## 1. Introduction

Global warming, climate change and increasing air pollution are among the environmental problems of today's world. Environmental problems, which have remained popular for nearly thirty years and the increasing sensitivity to these problems have led to an increase in researches among managers, both in academic literature and in practice. Ecology states that organizations operate within an economic structure that is dependent on the ecological system and that all of their activities induce profound environmental consequences [15]. Institutions are becoming more conscious of problems such as ecological pollution, use of non-renewable resources, greenhouse gas emissions and climate change and are turning to

green management practices in production stages and methods as well as finance, marketing and public relations activities.

The natural environment is valuable for organizations and economies while being sustainable. Sustainability essentially expresses an ethical concern about the need to provide and maintain a sound environmental base for present and future generations [33]. It is considered to be as a worldwide issue and highlights the view that the needs of future generations should be met by protecting natural resources and not destroying them. The vision of a sustainable environment means leaving an unpolluted, clean, livable world with undepleted resources to future generations.

Organizations increasingly observe that concerns existing in the environment and nature significantly affect their long-term success, survival and competitiveness. One of the principles of sustainability is that organizations should use the natural resources they consume during their activities in a renewable way. For this reason, it is important for businesses to have resort to renewable resources. The another essential and distinctive feature of the concept of sustainability is that it emphasizes longevity. Sustainability is a broad concept and is generally examined under three headings: environmental protection, economic growth and social development. The concept of sustainable environment underlines that existing natural resources are not unlimited.

Green human resources management seeks answers to the questions of how organization employees can be useful in protecting nature and how they can develop sustainability activities. These activities help organizations operate in an environmentally sustainable manner by generating high productivity, low costs and an atmosphere of good employee engagement. Today, organizations are successful in reducing the carbon footprint of their employees through methods such as teleconference, car sharing, remote teleworking, electronic filing, virtual meetings, recycling, online training, etc. Green HRM activities aim to improve the environmental performance of the organization and encourage the staff to participate effectively for this purpose. In recent years, the driving forces that have led businesses to adopt the concept of green management include the pressure resulting from global competition and the increasing environmental awareness of consumers. Businesses that respect the environment are transforming from their traditional management system and working concept to a contemporary system and concept that includes green practices. Thus, green human resource management (HRM) has become a contemporary business strategy for many enterprises. In such businesses, human resources departments have an active role in adopting green practices throughout the company.

## **2. Green HRM**

The natural environment is our most valuable resource. It is the responsibility of all of us to protect it and strive to ensure its continuity. This sense of responsibility has brought to

the fore the importance of green practices, which mean being “healthy”, “nature-friendly” and “environmentally friendly”. Therefore, a tendency from processes that harm the environment to being respectful towards it has come to the fore worldwide. The environmental problems have reached dimensions that cannot be ignored so it has made important green management processes to be implemented and be successful. This requires the organization's employees to be empowered as well as sensitive and considerate towards the environment and nature. In order to achieve this goal, the integration of human resources management into environmental management activities is essential. Therefore, the association of traditional human resources and environmental management leads to the emergence of a new concept known as green human resources management (GHRM) [28]. GHRM increases the environmentally friendly behaviors of the organization's employees.

Green HRM aims to ensure that the human resources of an organization are responsible towards nature and covers all activities related to this [20]. It supports the more continuous consumption of resources that are essential for business and recommends the implementation of human resources policies for this purpose. The goal of green human resources management is to be accountable towards the nature, minimize waste and reduce carbon emission rates while aiming to be economically profitable. GHRM includes a number of applications:

### ***2.1. Green Job Design***

Green job design focuses on the necessity for jobs specifically designed for the organization's environmental protection goals. [3]. In this context, green job design defines the duties and responsibilities required for a particular position and the knowledge, abilities and competencies required to perform that job in order to make the work process environmentally friendly [22]. Today, most organizations with high environmental values have begun to design new jobs or positions to make environmental protection their main principle [25]. Most businesses operating in globally competitive conditions have added at least one task related to environmental protection to their job descriptions. Therefore, the job description should identify and underline the environmental aspects of the job and what knowledge and skills the personnel need to perform the identified environmental activities [19; 27]. The goal of green job design is to include duties and responsibilities for environmental protection in every position in the organization. At the same time, it is the determination of the environmental aspects of each position and what a job expects from the employee [16].

### ***2.2. Green Recruitment***

In order to talk about green recruitment in organizations, it is essential to include green awareness and green practices in job descriptions. During green recruitment, individuals are evaluated according to their abilities, knowledge, attitudes and sensitivities that comply with environmental management strategies [1]. It is important that individuals are evaluated according to environmental awareness criteria so that they can adapt to the environmental

training they will attend later. In contemporary times, it is observed that the new generation is more knowledgeable about environmental issues and this affects their job search [30]. Recent studies have proven that the environmental, social and corporate activities of businesses are a meaningful element for job seekers.

Green recruitment is known as a paperless recruitment process that is beneficial to companies both economically and time-wise and has little environmental damage. Today, the development of technology and science has changed the speed and form of communication. The human resources unit has started to use electronic means such as online application forms, online interviews, video conferences, teleconferences or telephone calls to reduce environmental damage. All these innovations have led to a reduction in paper waste and fuel usage [24]. Green recruitment and selection emphasizes the essentiality of environmental values. As long as candidates who embrace a green vision are hired, individuals who are aware of the sustainable operations of companies will be recruited. These individuals master the main issues of reuse, environmental protection and a more sustainable nature [1].

### ***2.3. Green training and development***

There are two objectives in providing environmental training to employees in organizations. The first goal is to ensure that employees adopt the environmental policy of the organization. The second goal is to develop individuals' personal attitudes in this direction so that they can be more sensitive and conscious in their relationships with the environment. These two targets are very important, especially for developing industrial areas and service sectors. Green training and development informs personnel about the value and importance of environmental management. Businesses need to ensure that the training offered during this process is comprehensive, efficient and encouraging. The trainings should mainly cover environmental management, reuse, waste management, energy saving and the environmental activities of the organization. After employees are provided with green training, they should be encouraged to make recommendations on how to put the knowledge and competencies they have gained into action [21].

Individuals working in every position should participate in green training and development programs and training topics should include all elements of environmental and social fields. The adaptation process of newly appointed personnel should begin with these trainings. The trainer should prefer video and conference methods in this process. In addition, training should be prepared by choosing the online methods to reduce paper consumption [23].

### ***2.4. Green Performance Management and Appraisal***

The green performance system can be expressed as defining green business targets including environmental issues, determining green performance criteria and analyzing the results by the end of the period [34]. The examples of these issues are environmental strategies,

responsibilities and concerns. Green performance criteria include topics such as reducing carbon emissions, environmental responsibilities, concerns and policies in performance evaluations for all employees [31]. Appropriate use of green performance results [27] of individuals who do not meet these criteria or are not aligned with green goals can encourage them to act more environmentally consciously and strive for green goals in their future work [31]. Tang et al. [31] stated that green performance evaluation consists of four factors; these are first setting green goals, then creating green criteria, after analyzing the green outputs of the staff and finally using these results. Moreover, employees are informed how to achieve environmental goals or improve their environmental activities.

Including indicators related to environmental activity in performance standards will support individuals in adapting more easily to the organization's green instructions and practices. A developed performance assessment plan provides employees with valuable information and leads to tangible environmental outcomes for the company [14].

### ***2.5. Green Pay and Reward System***

The green pay and reward system is a financial and non-financial system that aims to encourage individuals to participate in the environmental strategies of the company. The sustainability and effectiveness of organizations' environmental performance depends significantly on green pay and reward practices. Green reward system plays a critical role in motivating managers and employees regarding environmental initiatives. Companies do this through both financial and non-financial rewards. Some companies give financial rewards (e.g. bonuses, cash, incentives) to their employees for high environmental performance. In others, employees are rewarded with non-financial rewards (special recognition/honors/prizes) for their successful environmental performance [3].

Businesses can be successful in developing their employees' green attitudes and behaviors through motivating reward programs. For example, encouraging feedback can be provided to employees through detailed, verbal evaluations that support them in this process. On the other hand, in order for green pay system to become more effective, it must be established in a way that reflects the value of environmental management. In this way, it will be emphasized that the company prioritizes environmental values. The sensitivity of the business management to environmental values encourages employees to act more consciously towards the environment.

### ***2.6. Green workplace safety***

Green workplace safety management goes beyond traditional workplace safety system and includes the environmental management strategies of the company [3]. It implements two main objectives. Firstly, it aims to create a safe workplace for individuals to remain physically, mentally and socially healthy by preventing accidents, injuries or disabilities, illnesses and losses that may occur in the workplace. Secondly, it aims to be sensitive towards nature and the

environment by preventing or limiting the consumption of objects that may harm the environment and by helping in the correct consumption of resources. Based on this, green workplace safety management ensures that there are no risk factors that may harm the health of individuals in the workplace, the workplace is safe in terms of equipment and minimum damage is caused to the environment during the execution of the work [12].

We can show the procedures such as the use of safety devices that keep the environment clean, the legal and ethical disposal of consumables such as gloves, masks, etc. used for safety purposes as examples of the regulations included in green workplace safety management. In addition, the creation of a green factory and green office system that is not contrary to the physical and mental body structure of the human can also be included in this list.

### ***2.7. Green employee relations***

Green employee relations is a procedure where all employees in the organization, regardless of their position, can participate in green processes and share their ideas [7]. In green human resources management, individuals are intended to become environmental volunteers as a team and to put forward ideas and recommendations for green practices [4].

Voluntary initiatives by employees in organizations are one of the key factors in the success of green processes. In addition to the steps taken to protect the environment, sharing and voluntary behavior within the organization has become a critical factor in preventing pollution. As is known, employees are in the right position to detect disorders or identify emission sources that cause pollution due to their proximity to business processes during their activities. For example, in manufactural organizations, personnel in the operator position can often detect persistent leaks of toxic products caused by work processes or detect technical errors or malfunctions that could have serious ecological effects. Identifying situations that may cause ecological problems like this is related to confidential information that personnel may or may not choose to share. Here, the optional sharing of confidential information is related to corporate citizenship attitudes that are important for improving pollution prevention methods. Environmental organizational citizenship attitudes are very important in supporting cooperation and solidarity in solving environmental problems and carrying out protective procedures. Generally, environmental organizational citizenship attitudes are successful in preventing environmental pollution and lead to the creation of a social context that supports the incorporation of environmental issues into daily processes [5].

## **3. The importance of green human resources management**

It is a fact that human resources practices has great power in ecological sustainability. In this sense, human resources management plays a key role in creating and realizing sustainable business processes throughout the organization. Green human resources practices

support the determination and achievement of environmental goals clearly and precisely, as well as the establishment of a balance between these goals and economic success criteria [26].

There are many benefits to an organization moving towards green HRM. These benefits are valuable to both the organization and its employees. In his research, Deshwal [9] lists the benefits of green human resources management to organizations as follows;

- Supports creating a corporate image to attract qualified human resources to the organization
  - Increases the brand image of the organization in the market
  - Helps the company maintain its competitive advantage in both the industry and the market
- Due to increasing environmental concerns, most organizations are becoming more mindful of their business processes and their impacts and consequences on nature
- Green management regulations are also beneficial to organizations as they support hard saving, reduce negative impacts and consequences on the environment and are therefore not subject to government intervention
  - Supports efficient consumption of resources and manages hazards effectively
  - Provides green learning environment in the organization
  - It leads to the development of employee behaviors to create environmentally friendly habits and tendencies in their professional and personal lives
  - Improves the overall quality of the organization, both internal and external
  - Increases employee morale, helps retain them and reduces turnover
  - Provides profitable opportunities for qualified human resources

#### **4. Organizational Sustainability**

The ability to exist continuously is expressed as sustainability. Sustainability can be seen as a process or situation that can be maintained at the desired level for a long time. The term sustainability was commonly understood as environmental sustainability for a long time. The social dimension of sustainability began to be given importance only in the second half of the 20th century [6]. In 1994, Elkington coined the term triple bottom line (TBL) for sustainable development [10]. The term triple bottom line refers to the importance of social, economic and environmental sustainability of an organization.

Organizational sustainability refers to everything about integrating of sustainable development goals such as social justice, economic efficiency and environmentally friendly effects into the business atmosphere of industries [32]. Organizational sustainability, on the other hand, is defined as “the adoption of organizational strategies and activities that meet the needs of the company and its stakeholders today while protecting, sustaining and developing the human and natural resources that will be needed in the future” [8].

Environmental sustainability can be defined as the combination of various corporate competencies or the overall performance of the organization to reduce the carbon footprint of

products [18]. It also means implementing practices that do not compromise environmental resources for future generations [2]. This is related to the efficient use of energy resources, reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and minimization of ecological footprint, etc. [13]. Environmental initiatives impact the business sustainability of organizations.

Social sustainability refers to implementing business practices that are beneficial and fair to labor, human capital and society [11]. Examples of these practices include fair wages and health insurance coverage. Ignoring social responsibility as well as the moral aspect of being “good” to society can affect the performance and sustainability of the business. Recent examples across industries have revealed that ignoring social responsibility has economic costs [2]. Social performance focuses on the interaction between society and the organization and addresses issues as community involvement, employee relations and fair wages [13].

Economic sustainability refers to the impact of the organization's business practices on the economic system [11]. It is about the ability of the economy, one of the subsystems of sustainability, to survive and develop into the future to support future generations [29]. Economic sustainability links the organization's growth to how well it contributes to the growth of the economy and supports it. In other words, it focuses on the economic value that the organization provides to the surrounding system in a way that enriches it and improves its ability to support future generations [2].

**Conclusion.** Environmental problems are one of the most important problems we face in this century and we need to underline them. Many different negative factors lead to environmental pollution and disruption of the natural balance. Misuse and overuse of the world's resources, natural disasters and environmental damage have become a source of concern in recent years. Therefore, the fact that environmental problems are a situation that should be managed by states and international agencies has come to the fore. At this point, companies have begun to implement green regulations that prioritize and take the environment into consideration in all their processes. One of the important units that directs green regulations in organizations and designs them effectively in all processes is the human resources unit. Thus, basing all HR practices, from recruitment to employee relations, on green sensitivity has made the transition to green HRM inevitable.

Green human resources management aims to successfully determine economic, social and environmental goals as well as reshape the human resources base. It also aims to minimize employees' carbon footprints through methods such as telecommunication, reducing paper consumption, task sharing, video conferencing and reducing the number of trips via Skype. Therefore, in order to achieve the environmental goals determined by the organization and to promote environmental sustainability, turning the staff into green individuals who prefer a life with a low carbon footprint and care about green management processes are among the main objectives of human resources management.



Green HRM needs to be implemented effectively in organizations. For this, management must provide the necessary assistance and support to the human resources unit and employees. The human resources department should also explain to the management the possible benefits and advantages that green HRM can bring to the organization in terms of environmental performance and convince them in this regard. Therefore, it is imperative that green HRM tools and methods are well prepared. HR practices that are more environmentally friendly, nature-friendly, increase productivity and support sustainability should be highlighted. Therefore, HR professionals should green core human resources procedures (staff recruitment, training and development, evaluation of professional activity, pay and reward management and employee relations) in line with HR policy. In this regard, HR policies and strategies have a primary impact on the organization's ability to achieve its environmental goals and ensure sustainability.

Organizations must be aware of their social responsibility towards the society they belong to, the world and future generations. Therefore, they should strive to be sensitive to the environment and nature, to protect it, not to pollute it and to treat it as a trust that we must pass on to future generations. Thus, companies should adopt greening in their policies and practices and make it a vision to keep the environment and nature green. This vision contributes to the acceptance of green business processes in the human resources department and other departments of the organization such as production, marketing and finance [17]. Thus, for a cleaner, healthier and more livable nature and world, all organizations will support environmental sustainability in all processes from crop production to marketing. At this point, the importance and effectiveness of green human resources management can be emphasized.

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