

The Role of Human Resource Management in Corporate Sustainability: A Literature Review

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Key words: Human resource management, sustainable HRM, corporate sustainability, green HRM, literature review

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Page No.: 295-302 Volume: 15, Issue 7, 2021

ISSN: 1993-5250

International Business Management Copy Right: Medwell Publications **Abstract:** One of the biggest global challenges of recent years has been the exploitation of the environment and the management of growing social challenges which has also required a significant shift in attitudes in the business sector. It has become clear that overcoming global challenges cannot be achieved without the involvement of policy makers and business leaders. In this study, the authors examined the contribution of human resource management to corporate sustainability. This research sought answers to how human resource management contributes to the achievement of environmentally conscious strategic management goals as well as which HRM practices support solving global problems indirectly by improving corporate sustainability. The results of secondary research confirm that human resource management plays a key role in the implementation of sustainable corporate operations and the role of HRM in corporate strategy is becoming more and more decisive. As a result of the spread of sustainable mindset, the traditional goal system of HRM has changed significantly and the sustainability aspects have been embedded in HR functions. The results of the research confirm that the application of sustainable human resource management has a number of positive effects, the benefits of which can be felt not only at the organizational and employee level but also indirectly at the level of local communities.

INTRODUCTION

Previously used human resource models defined the strategic role of HR based on its contribution to the firm's economic position^[1], so, the primary goal of conventional HR functions such as selection, performance evaluation and remuneration was clearly to increase market share. However, due to the exploitation of the environment and the increased use of natural resources, it has become

necessary to introduce the concept of sustainable development in corporate practice. Environmental protection and resource conservation has become a necessity of existence for future generations, necessitating a redefinition of operational strategies in the corporate dimension as well. Therefore, the paradigm of sustainable development no longer deals only with the achievement of economic goals but also takes into account the widely accepted social and ecological interests. Thus, corporate

sustainability can be interpreted as a sustainable business model based on the principles of responsibility-oriented management^[2]. Over the past 10-15 years, the global approach to business has changed rapidly and most organizations now seem to be pursuing multiple goals in their operations. Companies have also rethought the issue of success in the name of sustainability^[3,4] which has also reshaped the major goals of Human Management (HRM). A multi-dimensional sustainable HRM Model is emerging that increasingly focuses on long-term environmental and social aspects such as climate change, biodiversity, urbanization and the demographic characteristics of the workforce, rather than yields and market-driven short-term financial issues^[5]. The aim of the study is to provide an overview of the development of the concept of sustainable human resource management through secondary literature review, define the role of human resource management in corporate sustainability strategies and identify sustainable HR tools and practices that support the achievement of corporate sustainability goals.

RESULTS

Environmentally conscious strategic management: A new form of corporate strategy is the environmentally conscious corporate strategy which emphasizes the harmonious and balanced development of corporate activities and environmentally friendly, sustainable, inflation-free growth and the consideration of environmental interests^[6].

Kindler^[7], According to Kerekes and environmentally conscious strategy focuses responsible corporate strategic activity that sees the issue of environmental protection as an opportunity for the company to develop and grow. The aim of the environmentally conscious strategy is a high degree of prevention based on the precautionary principle. To this end, ecological and social requirements must be integrated into the company's strategic objectives, in a way that they do not lead to a deterioration in the company's competitiveness. An environmentally conscious strategy, therefore, helps companies to harmonize economic and ecological requirements and to lay the foundations for environmentally friendly activities. Environmentally conscious strategic management enables companies to develop and apply practices and tools that ensure the protection of the natural environment and the well-being of employees and local communities.

However, environmentally conscious corporate governance can only be effective if senior management can identify with an environmental awareness approach and be able to ensure that all units and employees of the organization take environmental considerations into account during their work. Achieving environmental goals

is inconceivable without employee involvement, success can only be achieved if an environmentally friendly mindset permeates the culture of the organization and employees are also committed to the programs. Beliefs embedded in the organization related to sustainability and environmental protection, accepted common values, the way of thinking used in decision-making and generally prevailing patterns of behavior play a decisive role in terms of environmental performance^[8].

Sustainable development: Nowadays, the concept of sustainable development is spreading, more and more companies around the world are applying the principles of sustainable development in their business activities^[9, 10]. Corporate sustainability is based on creating a harmonious relationship with different stakeholders and has many benefits for the organization. However, knowledge of the ecological impact of operational processes is essential for the implementation of the concept of sustainable development at the company level^[11].

The essence of corporate sustainability is that organizations need to monitor their impact on the economic, social and ecological environment and take social and environmental considerations into account in addition to economic considerations when defining success^[12, 13]. Thus, there are three basic dimensions to sustainable development^[14]:

- Ecological (protection of the environment and natural resources)
- Economic (economic development that does not hinder the development of technology and the use of resources, materials and labor but increases efficiency)
- Social (improving people's living conditions and social safety)

Sustainable development and HRM: The concept of sustainable HRM means linking the concept of sustainable development and human resource management. Sustainable HRM involves taking economic, social and ecological aspects into account when implementing human resource functions. Through the creation of a culture of sustainable development^[15], HRM can play a key role in implementing companie's sustainability-related thinking^[16]. Sustainable HRM encompasses HR practices that aim to maximize corporate effectiveness rather than efficiency and reduce negative impact mechanisms on employees and environment^[17]. According to Müller-Christ and Remer^[18], the essence of sustainable HRM is the responsibility for companies to create the conditions for lasting access to human resources in their environment. Cohen et al. [9], on the other hand, identified fairness, employee well-being and employee development as key dimensions of

sustainable HRM. Ehnert *et al.*^[19] argue that ensuring mental and physical health is an integral part of sustainable HRM which includes creating healthy workplace environment, reducing stress on employees and balancing work and private life.

Cohen *et al.*^[9] drew the following conclusions regarding sustainable human resource management:

- Supports the organization's sustainable development strategy
- Emphasizes fair treatment, employee development and well-being
- Contributes to the development of employee's skills and to increasing confidence and commitment to sustainable development
- Considers the interests of both internal (employees) and external stakeholders
- Supports environmentally friendly organizational practices

Approaches to sustainable HRM

Socially responsible HRM: In the early stages of the development of sustainable HRM, socially responsible HRM came to the fore with the long-term goal of cost-effective recruitment, selection, onboarding and development (Table 1). This definition, in the approach of Soft HRM, focuses on the preservation of human capital and serves a social purpose in addition to economic goals^[20].

The basic principle of corporate social responsibility is that company managers must manage organizations not only with the shareholders or their own interests in mind but also with the duty to take into account the needs of

society^[8]. Mariappanadar^[17] and Ehnert *et al.*^[19] found a similar result that HR management responsibilities transcend organizational boundaries, meaning that companies are not only responsible for the people they employ directly but also for members of the supply chain and for the communities in which they operate.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is an essential element of sustainable corporate policy. Corporate social responsibility is a strategy that lays the foundation for sustainable development by taking into account the social, economic and environmental impacts of the organization, the transparency of decisions and actions, ethical behavior and respect for human rights, laws and international rules. Corporate social responsibility is a long-term strategic approach based on the principles of social dialogue and finding solutions that benefit all stakeholders. It is a business activity that strikes a balance between the interests of different groups^[11].

Mozes *et al.*^[21] argue that companies benefit from pursuing CSR activities because employee participation in CSR activities is positively related to employee satisfaction and results in higher levels of organizational commitment and motivation.

Triple bottom line HRM: Triple Bottom Line HRM is the most commonly used concept in the field of sustainable HR, introduced by Elkington^[22]. The Triple Bottom Line (TBL) is a widely accepted perspective on sustainability that has won the support of scientists, society and various international organizations alike^[23]. The Triple Bottom Line approach attaches particular importance to the balance between a company's

Table	1:	Sustaina	ble	HRM	approaches

Approach	Defining representatives	Purpose	HR functions in focus	Expected results
Socially responsible	Thom and Zaugg ^[20] , Mariappanadar ^[17] ,	Cost-effectiveness	Recruiting	Achieving social
HRM	Ehnert et al.[19], Bombiak and	Taking the needs of	Selection	goals through the
	Marciniuk-Kluska ^[11] , Mozes et al. ^[21]	society, workers and local	Onboarding	preservation of
		communities into account	Employee retention	human capital
			Employee development	
Triple Bottom Line	Elkington ^[22] , Colbert and Kurucz ^[24] ,	Contributing to the	Organizational culture	Higher employee
HRM	Rimanoczy and Pearson ^[25]	economic, social and	Leadership competence	satisfaction, loyalty
		ecological goals of	development	and motivation
		sustainability	Further training	
Common good HRM	Aust $^{[26]}$ and Shen <i>et al</i> . $^{[27]}$	A fundamental change of	Strategy change,	Contribution to
		approach to organizational	planning	solving sustainability
		goals	Fairness, solidarity	problems
Green HRM	Harris and Tregidga ^[28] ,	Developing ecological	Job analysis and	Reducing
	Aust et al. [26], Bombiak and	awareness	planning recruitment	environmental
	Marciniuk-Kluska ^[11] ,	Creating a sustainable organizational culture	and selection	damage
	Jackson et al. [29], Rangarajan and		Onboarding	Increasing efficiency
	Rahm ^[30] , Mazur and Walczyna ^[31] ,		Employee retention	Cost reduction
	Opatha ^[32] , Likhitkar and Verma ^[33]		Training, development	Positive image
			Performance evaluation	Better environmental
			Employee incentive	performance
			programs	

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economic and social and environmental performance and the model is based on the assumption that these three dimensions are inseparable^[22].

The approach created a disagreement between business owners, managers, academics and activists for decades but in recent years, most world-leading companies are beginning to recognize the importance of Triple Bottom Line HRM^[24]. This finding was also confirmed by the survey of Westerman *et al.*^[34], in which more than three-quarters of corporate executives say the competitiveness of their business depends on their ability to move to low-carbon, clean technologies.

In the transition to the TBL business model, it is essential to reform the organizational culture, develop new leadership competencies, behaviors and a conscious mindset at all levels of the company. Human resource management plays a key role in this process^[24].

Adams *et al.*^[35] argue that companies that address the issue of sustainability in a proactive and innovative way represent the principles of the Triple Bottom Line adequately. The environmental performance of these types of organizations goes beyond strict regulatory compliance and sustainability is an important part of their corporate strategy, organizational culture and vision, based on continuous innovation including the improvement of products, processes and working conditions.

Common good HRM: Common good HRM represents a whole new approach in the context of business goals and HRM. All of the previous models align to some extent with the conventional profit-oriented approach. However, the common good HRM approach assumes that businesses have a fundamental responsibility to contribute to solving sustainability problems and challenges as this is a condition for their long-term survival^[26]. This approach takes into account the aspects of common good as well and requires organizations not only to re-evaluate their operating procedures but also to radically review the environmental and social impact of their traditional profit oriented approach. Under the new approach, the goals of fairness, solidarity and reciprocity will also come to the fore. Common Good HRM emphasizes the global and local role of organizations and the impact of business on the public good along economic, social, ecological and human dimensions^[27].

Green HRM: In our study, we emphasize the presentation of the significance and goal system of green HRM. One reason for this is that green HRM incorporates the HRM criteria described earlier and on the other hand, the new approach significantly transforms the practical implementation of traditional HR functions. The topic of green HRM is also emphasized in the international literature, as it provides many benefits to employers and

employees, contributes to the economic performance of organizations and its positive social and ecological impacts are also known.

Over the past decade, the concept of green HRM has emerged as a new approach to sustainable HRM that focuses primarily on the environmental sustainability of business organizations. The basis of green human resource management is the development of an ecological work environment and environmentally responsible employee attitudes. The new HRM approach aims to reduce the use of the environment by improving the ecological awareness of employees^[28, 36].

Green HRM is an employment model whose responsibilities include retaining and developing the talent needed to meet industry objectives. The aim of green HRM is therefore, to create, develop and retain a workforce that finds ecological initiatives useful and effective to apply in practice^[11, 37].

Green HR processes play a key role in the practical implementation of sustainable development and the development of a sustainable organizational culture^[11]. In addition, the model contributes to increasing efficiency, reduces operating costs and allows organizations to make better use of their knowledge and capital investments^[28].

The green HRM approach differs significantly from the previous CSR approach and has recently attracted increasing interest^[38]. Green HRM's objectives include integrating environmental sustainability aspects into existing HR functions^[28] which helps organizations implement green initiatives, improve companie's environmental performance and also has a positive impact on the organization's image. Rangarajan and Rahm^[30] found that firms that employ green HRM practices give the impression that they value the environment and social conditions which makes them attractive to potential employees.

Green human resource management involves the application of HR policies that contribute to the sustainable use of corporate resources, therefore, green human resource management is a set of personnel practices used to improve environmental performance^[11].

The importance of green human resource management: Research shows that environmental practices improve companie's performance, financial position^[39] and provide organizations with a competitive advantage, thus, increasing companie's interest in ecological issues and environmental protection^[11].

There is a growing perception that green management is a prerequisite for long-term economic, social and ecological sustainability. Renwick *et al.*^[40] argue that green HRM not only benefits the environment and natural resources but also supports the achievement of

organizational goals, employee commitment, satisfaction and performance, cost containment, business efficiency and a more pleasant work environment.

Green HRM not only alleviates the situation of companies but also helps to increase employee and social well-being^[41]. It can be stated that green HRM contributes to the reduction of environmentally damaging activities and waste, the rational management of natural resources which is also socially, ecologically and economically beneficial^[42]. Implementing green HRM, promoting a green organizational culture and encouraging environmentally oriented employee behavior are beneficial to the organization for a number of reasons. Nowadays, image is an increasingly important factor in the market success of businesses in which participation in environmental initiatives and ecological awareness is a key factor. These factors can provide companies with a lasting competitive advantage as environmentally friendly, organic products are becoming more and more popular among consumers and the existence of environmental certifications is also becoming an increasingly important aspect among business partners. It is therefore, in the interest of companies seeking to maintain and increase market share to orient their activities in an environmentally friendly direction and not to account for their environmental expenditures as an expense but as an investment for organizational development[11].

Another advantage for organizations is that green human resource management tools and processes increase employee's eco-innovation activities, reduce the amount of waste generated, improve product quality, increase process efficiency and reduce costs^[11].

Benefits of green HRM: Green human resource management supports the goals of environmentally conscious strategic management and the sustainability of the company. There are a number of benefits to using green human resource management based on increasing the ecological awareness of staff.

Benefits of green HRM^[33, 43] Benefits for the employer:

- Increases competitiveness, reduces costs, improves performance
- Increases market opportunities
- Improves the company's financial position
- Increases productivity and production quality
- Reduces negative environmental impacts and risks
- Contributes to the development of a harmonious relationship between the employer and the employee
- Improves the employee retention rate as well as the ability to attract labor
- Contributes to creating a more attractive organizational image

- Increases consumer and customer retention rate
- Improves relationships with local authorities, regulators and local communities

Benefits for employees:

- It improves employee well-being, loyalty, motivation and creativity
- Improves work ethic and job satisfaction
- It increases confidence and improves team spirit in the workplace
- It contributes to the development of competencies and skills
- Creates a healthy environment in the workplace

Sustainable HR practices and functions: The principles of a sustainable corporate strategy only apply if they are integrated into the HR functions of organizations. Based on Mazur and Walczyna^[31], the principles of green HR are applied in corporate practice in the following areas:

- Inclusion of environmental tasks in job descriptions
- Integration of green competencies and requirements in the selection process
- Giving priority to candidate's ecological experience in the recruitment and selection process
- Encouraging the development of green competencies and organizing environmentally conscious training for employees and managers
- The application of ecological criteria in the assessment of worker's performance
- Encouraging the sharing of knowledge on environmental initiatives as well as encouraging ecologically conscious behavior in practice

Job analysis and planning: Green organizations need to develop transparent rules and principles that define employee behavior and encourage employees to follow environmental considerations. The first phase of the implementation of green HRM concepts begins already during job analysis and job planning. For companies engaged in green management activities, it is important to define tasks related to environmental protection in all jobs, in addition to creating positions responsible for coordinating environmental management^[31, 32].

Recruitment and selection: An integral part of the implementation of green HRM practices is the integration of green competencies and requirements into the recruitment process and the prioritization of candidate's ecological experience during the selection process^[31]. In addition to setting expectations for candidates, companies with a green strategy use green recruitment and selection tools and recruit potential employees mostly through online job search portals, social media platforms and their own websites. The selection process for environmentally

conscious companies is also done electronically, the necessary administration is done electronically as well which significantly reduces paper consumption^[33].

Onboarding, orientation: As part of developing a green culture and mindset, companies address environmental topics affecting employees, the company's sustainability philosophy and the conditions and requirements for healthy and safe work^[33] as part of their new employee orientation programs. An essential part of the implementation of green HRM is to inform incoming workers about ecological requirements already during the onboarding and orientation process and about the need to prioritize environmental protection in their activities^[40]. It is important to involve employees in the development process-starting from their onboarding, focusing on their creative ideas-which is mutually beneficial for both employees and employers as it contributes to employee engagement already in the early stages employment^[33].

Training and development: In addition to the transfer of knowledge of ecology, environmental management and sustainability, the training and development system must also include job rotation practice. With the help of job rotation, employees can gain insight into the complex work processes of the organization which helps to understand the company's situation and processes related to environmental management. In addition to job rotation, employees should also be provided with special training in topics such as energy management, safe work and recycling^[33].

Performance appraisal and management: In addition to the framework of performance appraisal in the traditional sense as part of sustainable human resource management, employees should also be evaluated based on their contribution to the organization's green goals and their green performance. The practical implementation of green HRM, therefore, includes the reform of conventional performance measurement systems. It is important for employers to retain key employees who make continuous efforts for corporate sustainability, so, the employer should ensure that employees receive positive feedback on their efforts during performance appraisal^[33].

Incentives, sanctions: One of the key factors of sustainable HR is incentive. It is essential that employees who make an effort for corporate sustainability receive financial and moral recognition. In order for staff at all levels of the organization to be committed and motivated for sustainability, it is essential to develop a stable, organization-wide green incentive and compensation system^[32]. Green compensation includes incentives that

promote environmental activities within the organization^[40]. In addition, the Green HRM toolkit includes sanctions against employees who violate mandatory environmental principles^[11].

CONCLUSION

Over the past decade, the strategic role of human resource management has been significantly emphasized and reassessed, due to its central contribution to environmentally conscious strategic management and its central role in corporate sustainability strategy. Previously, the strategic importance of HR was determined by its role in the company's economic performance, traditional HR functions operated subordinated to monetary objectives and the primary expectation for HR practices was to increase market share. However, the exploitation of the environment and the increased use of natural resources have made it necessary to formulate sustainability as a strategic goal. HR functions play a key role in achieving sustainability goals which has resulted in an increase of the strategic role of human resource management. In the context of sustainability goals, human resource management is increasingly prioritizing long-term environmental and social considerations. Sustainable HRM supports the organization's sustainable development strategy, its principles include employee well-being, fair treatment, competency development, job retention and in addition to economic interests, it also pays attention to the interests of stakeholders and promotes environmentally friendly organizational practices.

The increasing importance of sustainability objectives has necessitated the rethinking of traditional HR goals. The objectives of sustainable HRM include contributing to the economic, social and ecological goals of sustainability, developing ecological awareness, promoting a fundamental change in attitudes and developing a sustainable organizational culture. The responsibilities of sustainable HRM go beyond previous organizational boundaries as they also have an indirect impact on members of the supply chain and local communities. In connection with the objectives, the traditional HR functions were reformed and the sustainability criteria were embedded in the functions of job analysis, recruitment and selection, onboarding, training and development, performance evaluation and motivation.

There are many benefits to using sustainable human resource management as environmentally friendly HRM practices increase a company's competitiveness and productivity, contribute to a more attractive organizational image that increases market opportunity, improves workforce and customer retention rates and improves relationships with local authorities, regulators and local

communities. In addition, the reduction of negative environmental impacts and costs, the improving financial situation and the increasing ability to attract labor can be highlighted as positive effects from an organizational point of view. Sustainable human resource practices also provide a number of benefits to employees as they have a positive impact on employee well-being, loyalty, motivation and creativity, they increase job satisfaction through improved work ethic and team spirit and contribute to the development of competencies and skills. Sustainable HRM also contributes to the achievement of social and ecological goals and the solving of global environmental and social problems.

Funding: This research was funded by Smart Specialisation Programme at the University of Kaposvár (EFOP-3.6.1-16-2016-00007).

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