Green HRM - Partner in Sustainable Competitive Growth

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Abstract: The Green Human Resources Management (Green HRM) has emerged from companies engaging in practices related to protection of environment and maintaining ecological balance. The source of such initiatives, referred to as green management, is the green movement with its agenda of Protection of Environment and saving the planet Earth from future man made disasters. Green HRM encompasses all activities aimed at helping an organisation carry out its agenda for environment management to reduce its carbon footprint in areas concerning on boarding and acquisition of human resources, their induction, performance management, learning and development and compensation and reward management. Green HRM can play a useful role in business in promoting environment related issues by adopting and following Green HR policies and practices. Green HRM can enhance corporate image and brand. Green HR will play an important role in making the employees aware of and concerned for preservation of natural resources and contribute in pollution control, waste management and manufacture of eco-friendly products.

1 INTRODUCTION

Green is the most beautiful colour in the world and is the colour of nature. A walk down green meadows and jungles makes you feel happy, relaxed and free from stress and strains of life. Being with nature and environment can ultimately bring us happiness and prosperity- be it our personal lives or business endeavours. But wanton misuse of natural resources by man has brought us to a point where our existence on our planet and our prosperity are threatened with global warming, reduction in ozone layers, reduction in forest cover and melting of ice mountains and glaciers. The recent Uttarakhand disaster is a grim reminder by our mother earth not to disturb ecological balance, and the paramount need to control deforestation, pollution, carbon emissions by consciously preserving natural resources. The green movement for protection of environment has influenced business and industry to adopt environment friendly practices and products which is referred to as Green management. Green HR is an off-shoot of Green management philosophy, policies, and practices followed by a firm for Environment Management. Green HRM comprises all activities, aimed at helping an organisation carry out its agenda for Environment Management to enable it to reduce its carbon footprint and earn carbon credits, in areas concerning on boarding and acquisition of human resources, their induction, performance management, learning and development and compensation and reward management. The present economy worldwide can be termed as a green economy in which organisations have to address “green” issues in response to consumer and employee expectations ,and the environmental changes. Against this backdrop, it can be assumed that environmentally conscious organizations will have sustainable competitive growth in the era of green economy. Organisations globally are adopting green management policies and practices in different management spheres for inclusive growth, and out of their concern for environmental protection. Companies following “green” HR practices can experience substantial impact on the engagement, commitment, morale, quality of work life and the retention of human capital in the organization.

Green Human Resource Management is emerging as an important thrust area for management which can have an enormous impact on people issues in an organization. The term ‘green HR’ is often used to refer to the contribution of HR policies and practices towards the broader corporate environmental agenda of protection and preservation of natural resources. When we talk about Green HR , two essential elements have to be considered: environmentally friendly HR practices and the preservation of knowledge capital. Green HR can adopt various Green processes and
practices in different HR functions like acquisition of human capital, their induction, training, performance management and reward management which will have a bearing on the overall carbon footprint of a company. In current business environment marked by recession and turbulence which has hit all economies around the world, including India, companies are resorting to downsizing and lay-off and in the process also losing that valuable knowledge capital which, in present times of talent crunch, is often difficult and costly to replace. Green HR initiatives can help companies find alternative ways to bring down cost without losing their talent. In green economy organizations have tremendous growth opportunities by going green and creating a new environmental DNA which can bring in immense operational savings by reducing their carbon footprint. Green HR can become an active partner in achieving this objective by creating a Green HR platform where the workforce experience high job satisfaction and being better engaged, which will result in higher productivity. Green HRM initiatives help create a culture of having concern for the well being and health of fellow workers, besides the overriding concern for environmental protection which is a sine qua non for a healthy and happy life for all of us on this planet. Some common examples of Green HR activities can be use of job portals of companies for recruitment and the use of telephonic, online and video interviews. This can reduce the travel requirements of the candidates, besides causing reduction in paper work. As part of compensation management, companies can institute Green rewards to employees in the form of nature-friendly workplace and lifestyle benefits, which may include carbon credit offsets, free bicycles and pollution-free vehicles for commuting to and in the workplace in order to engage people in the green agenda. While many employees are not conscious of their responsibility to protect the environment while they are at work, the new workforce of millennial, particularly the knowledge and highly skilled workers, are emphasizing environmental consciousness as they choose their employers. The talented and knowledge workers look for meaning and self-actualization in their jobs in order to stay committed to the companies they are working in and Green HR can help create this commitment by following green values and practices. Other green activities can concern minimum use of paper and printed materials in recruitment, performance appraisals, and learning and development.

It must be realized that HR alone cannot contribute to improved business results by incorporating Green HR processes. Organisations have to invest in the green agenda of the business as a whole. Some of the areas where a company can build its green business can include decreased use of printed material, increased recycling, using reusable grocery and lunch bags, and prohibiting the use of bottled water, plastic and Styrofoam cups in the workplace. Work stations can have fluorescent light bulbs and other energy saving and green devices. Companies can encourage employees to change their travel and transportation habits by limiting official car trips, using metro and public transport for business travel, carpooling, providing interest free loans to buy hybrid cars, and cycling or walking to work. Business meetings and conferences can be conducted through internet, tele and video conferencing, wherever possible, in order to minimize business travel. Similarly by following flexi working, employees can be offered opportunities to "tele work" or work from home. Internet and intranet facilities today allow companies to communicate with employees through emails and company portals, thereby reducing the need of printing and of papers. Wellness programs for employees, their family members and general public can be organised to highlight physical fitness, proper nutrition, and healthy life-style. Organisations can discharge their social responsibility by including environment management in their mission statement as an important green objective. Companies should organise cleanliness and waste management drives in the workplaces and surrounding society to create awareness about green issues.

Many companies, which are taking a greener approach inside their organisation, are experiencing a positive and congenial effect on the patterns of employee relations in the organisation. This also has a positive influence on the mindset of employees as they feel that apart from their functional contribution on the job, they have an important responsibility in preserving environment.
Some of the practices concerning general green management in which HR is actively involved have been described above. Specifically the functional areas where HR can have a green approach and which can have a bearing on acquisition, development and retention of human capital could be the following.

A The on boarding process
With the use of new and advanced technology, organisations need less paper in all aspects of recruitment and selection process. Resumes are submitted online, company websites are used by candidates to search for jobs and resumes are invited online, which helps to substantially reduce waste created from printing and mailing resumes. This process is not only completely paperless, but also makes one’s career more accessible and easily shared with potential hirers. Organizations can also use online portals for on boarding documentation such as offer letter, credentials and testimonials regarding qualifications and experience of selected candidates, acceptance letter and so, on which can significantly reduce the amount of paper used after an offer has been accepted by a new employee. Information about the company and job descriptions of advertised positions on its website also help companies in the orientation of new employees.

B Sourcing and Acquisition of Human Resources
To start with, HR Department can make Green/EM (Environmental Management) job descriptions for employees. As higher level executives have to take greater responsibility for green initiatives, green goals should be included in managerial job descriptions. While developing the competency model for talent, an organisation can include environmental consciousness as one of the core competencies required of employees. Green job candidates, who comprise a large section of talented and knowledgeable manpower, use Green criteria when applying for jobs, and, therefore, companies having green practices can attract good talent. This means organizations have to ‘practice green’ in order to build a Green Employer brand (green employer of choice). Preference in selection should be given to candidates who are ‘Green aware’, which becomes a part of the HR acquisition policy. Employers, having strong green brand are more likely to attract talent than those who do not have green philosophy.

C Induction
Employee orientation programmes should be designed in such a way as to facilitate the integration of new employees into a culture of green consciousness. Induction programmes should highlight an organisation's concern for green issues of employees like their health, safety and green working conditions.

D. Performance management and appraisals
Performance management systems should be developed to include ‘green’ targets in the key performance areas (KPA). This can be translated into Green performance standards and Green behaviour indicators which should serve as yardsticks in performance appraisal of employees at all levels. Green targets, goals and responsibilities should be established for managers and achievement of managers in accomplishing Green results should included in appraisals. Examples of such contributions can include creating awareness and familiarisation of green issues amongst the subordinates, encouraging them to involve themselves in green activities of the company and facilitate environment management learning. Those exceeding the standards maybe be identified as ‘Green Super Keepers’ (exceptionally talented employees) and allocated rewards based on their green contributions.

E. Learning and Development
Training, development and learning plans should include programmes, workshops and sessions to enable employees to develop and acquire knowledge in environment management, green skills and attitude. Job rotation in green assignments should become an essential part of career development plans of talented green managers of the future. Training contents should be developed to increase employee competencies and knowledge in Environment
Management. Extensive use should be made of online and web-based training modules and interactive media as training tools for not only for environment management training but for other functional areas as well. Environment- related aspects of safety, energy efficiency, waste management and recycling can become the focal points of green training. Training managers should rely more on online course material and case studies rather than on printed handouts, thus further reducing use of paper.

F. Compensation and Reward management

Compensation and reward management should recognise contributions in green management. Compensation packages should be customised to reward green skills acquisition and achievements by employees. Monetary- based, non-monetary based and recognition- based rewards can be used for green achievements of employees. Monetary-based rewards for contributions in environment management can be allocated in the forms of salary increase, cash incentives and bonuses while non-monetary rewards may include sabbaticals, special leave and gifts to employees and their family members. Recognition-based awards can highlight green contributions of employees through wide publicity and public praise and appreciation of green efforts by CEO or top management executives.

From a study conducted by M/s. Buck Consultants in U.S. In 2008, it was found that about a half of the companies surveyed practice strategic environmental management. “The Greening HR Survey” indicates that in U.S., 54% organizations incorporated environmental management in their business operations, 74% used online portals to reduce travel, 76% promote reduction of paper use and 60% implement wellness and fitness programmes for employees. In India, green movement and Green HR is still in a nascent stage with a few companies following green agenda. Green Toyota’ has made a public pledge that it would do business only with those concerns that are certified “Green”. The Tata Group has gone “Green” and has made a list of third parties, vendors and suppliers whom it deals with in the course of business without releasing toxic emissions that could harm the environment. There are many companies implementing Corporate Social Responsibility(CSR) initiatives which also have green projects. ITC Ltd. and The Associated Cement Companies Ltd.(ACC Ltd.) have since long practised CSR with emphasis on environment management This has helped generate interest and awareness about green movement and green HRM IN India. HRM has to play a central role in creating awareness about environment management in organisations besides taking the lead in implementing Green HR practices as part of the bigger role to save planet earth.

REFERENCES