

Integrating Green Human Resource Management In Greece: Challenges, Opportunities, And Strategic Imperatives For Sustainable Transformation

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Abstract

Climate change, global warming, and the depletion of natural resources have created growing pressure on organizations to adopt sustainable practices. Sustainability, as a strategic choice, is no longer confined to environmental policies alone but is being integrated into every aspect of business operations, including human resource management.

Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) represents a new approach that focuses on fostering an environmentally friendly corporate culture through strategies that promote sustainability across all levels of HR management. From green recruitment and training to the inclusion of environmental criteria in performance appraisals, GHRM has the potential to make a significant contribution in addressing environmental challenges.

Keywords: *Green Human Resource Management (GHRM), Sustainability, Organizational Culture, Environmental Strategy, Human Capital Development, Green Skills, Strategic HRM*

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I. Introduction

The integration of sustainable development into human resource management (HRM) strategies is emerging as a critical dimension that can positively influence organizational culture and operations. As a function that directly affects an organization's ability to adapt and innovate, HR management must adopt practices that promote sustainability—from recruitment and training processes to employee development and engagement (Opatha & Arulrajah, 2014).

In today's rapidly changing social and environmental landscape, organizations face increasingly intense challenges related to sustainability and the necessity to adapt. Sustainable development, which balances economic, environmental, and social dimensions, is recognized as a core priority for long-term organizational success and resilience. (Murray et al., 2017)

The role of human resources is pivotal in this process, as people are the most valuable asset of any organization. The HR department is not only responsible for managing human capital but also for cultivating a culture that promotes sustainability. Through strategies involving the attraction, training, and development of employees, HR can play a decisive role in the transition toward a more sustainable organization. (Mandip, 2012; ILO, 2019).

II. Theoretical Background

Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) refers to the integration of environmental objectives into HR practices. Organizations that adopt GHRM aim to reduce their environmental footprint through green strategies in recruitment, training, performance appraisal, and employee engagement (Renwick et al., 2013). GHRM involves utilizing human resource management policies to support the sustainable use of resources within organizations.

The term "**Green Human Resource**" is frequently used to describe HR policies and practices that align with broader corporate environmental programs (Rani & Mishra, 2014).

The **development stages of Green Human Resource Management** (Renwick et al., 2013) are as follows:

- **Initial Phase – Environmental Awareness:** At first, the concept of green management focused primarily on raising environmental awareness and implementing basic energy- and resource-saving strategies (e.g., recycling, use of renewable energy sources).
- **Middle Phase – Adoption of Green HR Policies:** Subsequently, HR professionals began recognizing the value of sustainability practices in developing human capital.
- **Recent Phase – Strategic and Systematic Integration:** The development of competencies such as environmental responsibility, sustainability strategy, and green innovation leadership has become essential for employees and executives alike.
- **Future Evolution:** As environmental responsibility and sustainability remain key priorities for businesses, GHRM is expected to evolve further, incorporating innovative technologies, the use of artificial intelligence for monitoring employees' environmental performance, and the ongoing promotion of ecological workplace culture.

Sustainable development is based on **three pillars** (Murray et al., 2017):

- The **environmental dimension**, ensuring the planet can support life without depleting natural resources or harming ecosystems long-term.
- The **social dimension**, focusing on justice, equality, access to essential services (like healthcare, education, and housing), as well as social participation and cohesion, the safeguarding of workers' rights, and overall well-being.
- The **economic dimension**, reflecting businesses' capacity to contribute to national economic growth and prosperity.

Among the **theoretical frameworks**, two key theories are highlighted:

- **Stakeholder Theory**, which maintains that organizations should address the needs of not only shareholders but also other stakeholders such as employees and the environment. (Newton & Harte, 1997).
- **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Theory**, which reflects organizations' commitment to acting responsibly and contributing to the welfare of society and the environment beyond financial profit. (Mandip, 2012; Murray et al., 2017).

III. Research Methodology

For the purposes of this research, a questionnaire was developed aiming at understanding the challenges and motivations driving companies and public sector organizations towards adopting Green Human Resource Management practices, as well as the obstacles they encounter.

The study targeted Greek citizens across the country working in either the public or private sector. A suitably structured questionnaire was prepared, converted into a Google form, and distributed through social media and communication platforms (LinkedIn, Email, Facebook, Viber, etc.). The questionnaire comprised a total of 15 questions, organized into 5 different sections. A total of 164 completed questionnaires have been evaluated and analysed accordingly.

IV. Research Results

The findings of this study highlight a selective and operationally driven approach to Green Human Resource Management in Greek companies, with a strong focus on energy-saving measures and flexible work arrangements. While environmental education and diversity initiatives show moderate adoption (*University of the Aegean, 2021*), the limited integration of environmental criteria in recruitment, reward systems for ecological behavior, and carbon management within work processes suggests that strategic, HR-led sustainability initiatives remain underdeveloped.

This contrasts with international trends, where a more holistic and embedded application of GHRM practices is gradually becoming standard (*Renwick et al., 2013*). The results underscore the need for Greek organizations to transition from isolated environmental actions to comprehensive, HR-integrated sustainability strategies. Practically, this indicates opportunities for policy-makers, HR professionals, and corporate leaders in Greece to align organizational practices with evolving global GHRM models, fostering a culture where environmental and social responsibility are systematically incorporated into the employment lifecycle. (*Centre for Planning and Economic Research, 2021; Hellenic Federation of Enterprises, 2022*)



The findings of the survey examining the perceived impact of Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) practices on organizations reveal noteworthy insights into how participants assess the influence of green strategies across different aspects of business operations. The majority of companies report that the most significant benefits of GHRM are the reduction of operating costs (54.88%) and the improvement of corporate image (42.07%), while the enhancement of environmental sustainability (51.22%) is also considered an important outcome. However, the impact on employee satisfaction (15.85%) and productivity (12.8%) appears relatively limited. This pattern suggests that while Greek companies increasingly recognize the external and operational advantages of GHRM, its internal, employee-centered benefits are less emphasized or not yet fully realized.

When compared to international trends, these findings highlight a notable divergence. Global studies consistently emphasize the dual role of GHRM in both improving environmental performance and enhancing employee engagement, satisfaction, and organizational commitment (*Renwick et al., 2016; Guerri & Carollo, 2016*). In many international contexts, GHRM is strategically positioned not only as a tool for operational efficiency and corporate reputation but also as a driver for fostering a sustainable organizational culture that motivates and empowers employees. The relatively lower perceived impact on employee satisfaction and productivity in Greek companies suggests an opportunity for further development of internal, people-centered green practices that align employee well-being with environmental objectives (*Deloitte, 2023*). This underlines the need for a more integrated GHRM approach in Greece that balances operational and human-centered outcomes in line with global best practices.



The most significant challenge, cited by 40.1% of respondents, is the lack of specialized knowledge and skills necessary for the effective application of green strategies. This finding highlights a critical need for employee training and development, as well as the potential recruitment of specialists in environmental management and sustainable HR initiatives to support the successful integration of GHRM practices. The second most reported barrier is the lack of resources, with 30.9% indicating that limited financial capacity or human resources hinder the full implementation of green strategies. The adoption of GHRM frequently requires investment in new technologies, training programs, and updated management systems—factors that may be particularly challenging for organizations in economically constrained environments.

Additionally, resistance to change among employees and the lack of support from top management were identified as secondary, yet notable, obstacles that must be addressed to achieve effective GHRM integration.

Globally, organizations face similar challenges, particularly in developing green competencies and securing management commitment (Renwick et al., 2016). However, advanced economies such as Germany, the Netherlands, and Canada have proactively responded by establishing national programs for green skill development (ILO, 2019) and integrating sustainability education into formal HR training pathways. Furthermore, international markets increasingly leverage digital tools and AI-driven systems to overcome resource constraints and improve efficiency in green policy implementation—options that remain underutilized in the Greek context. (NSRF 2021–2027)

The persistence of financial limitations as a barrier in Greece also aligns with broader economic challenges facing the region, whereas in many international settings, corporate sustainability budgets and ESG-linked investments are growing. This comparison underlines the need for Greek organizations to prioritize green capacity-building initiatives and seek strategic collaborations or external funding opportunities to overcome resource limitations, while also fostering a stronger environmental culture within their HR frameworks. (Hellenic Federation of Enterprises, 2022).



To sum up, the survey indicated the need for Greek companies to:

- **Invest in green skills development** through training programs and partnerships with academic institutions.
- **Enhance the use of digital tools** (HRIS, green dashboards) to monitor and manage environmental performance.
- **Embed environmental values into HR policies, recruitment, and reward systems** to foster deeper employee engagement.
- **Secure leadership commitment and external partnerships** to overcome resource limitations and align with global sustainability benchmarks.

V. Conclusions

The implementation of GHRM in Greece exhibits significant variation, depending on the size of the organization, industry sector, geographic location, and most importantly, organizational culture. (Harris & Crane, 2000)

Despite noteworthy initiatives by certain companies, GHRM application in Greece remains at an early stage. The key challenges limiting the widespread adoption of GHRM practices include:

- A) Limited awareness of the benefits of GHRM
- B) Lack of specialized tools and infrastructure
- C) Resistance to change due to costs and organizational inertia.

Nevertheless, there is growing interest from businesses in EU co-funded programs (e.g., NSRF, Recovery and Resilience Fund). The availability of incentives such as tax exemptions or access to funding for investments in green skills could accelerate GHRM adoption (FEIR, 2022).

International experience highlights GHRM as a fundamental pillar of corporate transformation toward sustainability. In advanced economies, GHRM is already being integrated at several levels:

- A) Training and green skills development
- B) Technology and digitalization
- C) Certification and transparency.

It is clear that strengthening GHRM requires a multi-level approach, combining awareness-raising interventions, training, institutional support, and partnerships. Creating suitable awareness mechanisms can produce multiplier effects. Raising awareness may be achieved through the organization of informational events and seminars, as well as awareness campaigns.

Sustainability cannot be achieved without upgrading human capital. The green transition demands the development of knowledge, skills, and behaviors through lifelong learning initiatives, such as employee training programs and the introduction of sustainable management curriculum in universities. (ILO, 2019; Mandip, 2012).

Implementing GHRM requires resources and investment. Hence, providing targeted incentives is crucial to encourage businesses, especially Small-Medium Enterprises (SME), to undertake relevant initiatives. The government can establish fiscal and financial incentives while leveraging EU financial tools for SME advisory programs supporting GHRM integration. (Ministry of Development and Investments, 2022)

GHRM effectiveness is enhanced when shaped through collaborations between the public and private sectors. This can be achieved through partnerships among companies, NGOs, and universities. Additionally, the development of a national platform containing a database of the best GHRM practices is recommended. (Hellenic Federation of Enterprises, 2022)

Sustainability also requires structured measurement and transparency thus adopting GHRM alone is not sufficient. Consequently, it is proposed to introduce **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)**, and an **Independent Authority for CSR**, in cooperation with the Ministry of Development, to publish annual reports on GHRM progress in Greece, contributing to the monitoring of national and European sustainability targets.

Therefore, the ultimate goal is the full integration of GHRM into all aspects of human resource management: from recruitment and training to leadership, performance appraisal, and organizational culture (Renwick et al., 2013; Opatha & Arulrajah, 2014). Businesses must shift from **reactive compliance** to **proactive innovation**, where GHRM becomes a tool for:

- Environmental sustainability
- Organizational innovation
- Social responsibility
- Competitive differentiation

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