

A STUDY OF GREEN HR PRACTICES IN SRI LANKAN ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract

It is a growing need for organizations to move towards a better environmental management: in other words, to go “Green”. Green HRM is the Human Resources aspect of the concept of Green and is a novel field on which researchers are yet to explore. This study is an attempt to discover the different Green HR practices used by the Sri Lankan organizations and their significance in the commercial sector. The study adopted qualitative methodology through interviews to gather data on Green HR practices of organizations. Purposive sampling was used as the sampling method and thematic analysis was used for data analysis. Online job advertising, tele-recruitment, recyclable ID cards, electronic pay slip, waste management, energy management, controlled air pollution, reduced carbon emission, CSR activities to protect the environment, on-line work arrangements, attitude changing programmes and awareness programmes are among the findings as existing Green HR practices. The concept of Green HR is yet to develop in order to achieve its whole purpose. In Sri Lanka, this concept has not yet achieved its due recognition as an effective tool in ensuring a better environmental management. But it is good to observe that some Sri Lankan organizations are now recognizing Green HRM and implementing Green HR practices into their organizations through which despite the already existing advantage of being eco-friendly, the companies are further benefitted by the economical and marketable aspects of following these practices.

Keywords: Green HRM, HR Practices

Background of the study

Contemporary enterprises struggle to persist and succeed in the ever volatile and dynamic businesses by adapting to the most recent business movements. Due to the rapid fluctuations in the natural environment, business enterprises have to adopt eco – friendly practices towards their short, medium, and long term accomplishments. Camen et al., (2010) stated a worldwide consensus has initiated to appear around the need for proactive ecological management. Moreover, the modern society is breathing in world where the environment is struggling to persist. Messy weather patterns across the globe provide some insights for the necessity of employing eco-friendly practices. In today’s context scholars identify the significance of green practices towards the arena of human resources management (Daily FT, June 25th 2012). For the purpose of this study the term green practices means doing business in an approach which reduces waste, protects energy, and commonly promotes sustainability and environmental health (Renwick, Redman, & Maguire, 2008). The term Green Human Resources (herein after referred to as HR) is used to denote to the involvement of HR policies and practices to the comprehensive corporate ecological schedule of protection and preservation on natural resources (Prasad, 2013). Many organizations around the world have already implemented green HR practices within their enterprises. Scholars indicate diverse green HR initiatives which are already in use; Web or teleconferencing is used in recruitment and training programmes in order to reduce travelling cost, Human Resource Information Systems are used as a means of promoting the reduction of the use of paper and executing wellness programs ensure proper employees nutrition, fitness, and healthy living (Daily FT, June 25th 2012). The main intention of this study is to explore the green HR practices used by Sri Lankan organizations since the impact of environmental practices on the whole HR function is wide. Wehrmeyer and Oates (1996) (as cited in Renwick, Redman, and Maguire, 2008, p. 4) stated that environmental difficulties have an influence on recruitment in United Kingdom and survey data shows that most outstanding graduates judge the environmental performance and reputation of a company as a dimension for decision making when applying for jobs. Considering the above points, the researchers decided to explore the existence of green HR practices within Sri Lankan companies.

Literature Review

Sudin (2011) emphasized that the concept of green management for sustainable development generally seeks to explain the need for balance between industrial growth for wealth creation and safeguarding the natural environment so that the future generations may thrive. As per Renwick, Redman, & Maguire (2008) there is a growing need for the integration of environmental management into Human Resource Management– Green HRM. Green human resources refer to using every employee interface to promote sustainable practices and increase employee awareness and commitments on the issues of sustainability (Vij, Suri, & Singh, 2013). They further explain that Green HR involves undertaking environment-friendly HR initiatives resulting in greater efficiencies, lower costs and better employee engagement and retention which in turn help organizations to reduce employee carbon footprints by the likes of electronic filing, car-sharing, job-sharing, teleconferencing and virtual interviews, recycling, telecommuting, online training, energy-efficient office spaces etc. (Vij, Suri, & Singh, 2013).

Renwick, Redman, and Maguire (2008) in their process model format of HRM (from entry to exit) demonstrate that in the process of recruitment green practices are engaged in by means of green job descriptions, green goals, green job candidates, recruitment of employees who are 'Green aware' and green employer branding (green employer of choice). When it comes to performance management and appraisal, green performance indicates communication of green schemes to all levels of staff, establishing firm wide dialogue on green matters and green targets, goals and responsibilities set forth by managers (Renwick, Redman, & Maguire, 2008). In the field of training and development, Green HR practices are visible in the introduction of training on environmental management, integrating training on instruction and generation of eco-values, development of employee skills, and competence building in environmental management, socialization in Green values/management, training schemes to produce green analysis of workspace and increase staff knowledge, and training in environmental management aspects of safety, energy efficiency, waste management, and recycling (Renwick, Redman, & Maguire, 2008). Renwick, Redman, and Maguire (2008) further mentioned the possibility of employing Green HR practices in Employment Relationships: employee involvement and participation in Green suggestion schemes and problem-solving circles, staff independence to form and experiment with green ideas, forming unions for negotiating Green workplace agreements, using Green elements in the health and safety process, encouraging employees to use green forms of transport etc. As Green HRM practices related to compensation, Renwick, Redman, and Maguire (2008) emphasize on a Green pay/reward system, tailor packages to reward green skills acquisition, the use of monetary-based rewards (bonuses, cash, premiums), the use of recognition-based rewards (awards, dinners, publicity, external roles, daily praise), develop negative reinforcements (criticism, warnings, suspensions for lapses), develop positive rewards (feedback), link participation in Green initiatives to promotion/career gains (managers advance through supporting staff), line rewards to motivate employees etc. Renwick, Redman, and Maguire (2008) added in cases of dismissal (at the point of exit) managers may question if Green issues had been among possible reasons for resignation (moving to a more Green employer?), the role of exit interviews to gauge perceptions of firm Green-ness, whistle-blower accounts on state of firm Green-ness, legal protection for green whistle-blowers etc.

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to systematically observe, discover, and elucidate the phenomena studied. Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2004) asserted qualitative research methodology to be the most appropriate methodology to be used for studies of similar disciplines. For this study purpose, the researchers have selected the single case study method. Yin (2003) stated that if the main attention of a research is to find a solution for "how" and "why" questions then, a case study design would be more applicable. This study attempts to explore the green HR practices used by the company which was selected through the purposive sampling technique. Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2004) stated purposive sampling to be using the researchers' decisions and purposefully attempting to select individuals who arrange a precise condition. Additionally, it simplifies people to apply their decisions to select cases which are more appropriate to provide an effective answer for the study and to achieve the research objectives in a suitable way.

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For this study purpose, the researchers selected a Sri Lankan blue chip company which belongs to the manufacturing sector. The name of the company will herein after be referred to as company “X” due to ethical concerns. Thematic analysis was used as the research analysis method with focus in exploring themes within data in order to obtain a quality data set.

Discussion

The foremost intention of this study is to explore the different green HR practices used by Sri Lankan Organizations. The researchers attempted to analyze the findings with regard to various HR functions of the selected company.

On boarding process

Due to rapid improvement in the arena of Information Technology, the companies are having a propensity to carry out the processes of recruitment and selection by avoiding the use of papers (Prasad, 2013). Accordingly, Company “X” has implemented the paperless recruitment and selection process to become an environmental friendly organization. When a position becomes vacant, the HR department of the company “X” prioritizes internal staff applications over those from external sources. The main intention of this action is to minimize negative costs of recruitment. By reducing carbon emission during travelling, the company is able to decrease the carbon footprint providing a positive impact towards the nature. Equally, Company “X” makes use of intranet the internet to circulate existing vacancies within the company thus minimizing job posting and paper documents. Moreover, the company uses top job sites and social media to advertise its vacancies while encouraging prospective candidates to apply via online, thereby reducing the release of carbon, coloured ink and numerous chemicals to the environment. Vij, Suri, and Singh (2013) asserted the importance of using virtual interviews and teleconferencing towards recruitment and selection of employees. Similarly, company “X” encourages the use of email as a means of reducing paper wastage while preliminary interviews are conducted via the phone in order to reduce the generation of carbon discharge.

Job designing

Prasad, (2013) stated, the HR department of each company can introduce green job descriptions for employees and top level staff should be accountable for green initiatives and green goals. Accordingly, the position of Corporate Social Responsible Manager (CSR Manager) has been introduced by the HR department of Company “X” whose job description involves responsibility for implementing a green agenda for company “X” and performing CSR activities to ensure eco-friendliness. Moreover, the company has updated job descriptions of employees who are currently working in their factories.

Induction, training and development

After undertaking recruitment and selection, organizations are accountable for conducting induction programmes to familiarize newly joined employees with the organization. Company “X” performs a comprehensive orientation programme highlighting the green aspects of the company in which the HR department offers an extensive understanding on the company’s environmental policy, ISO 14001:2004 standards, housekeeping, 5’S and lean concepts to ensure moral obligation towards the natural world. Tele-Conferencing, online training and web based training modules are commonly used by modern organizations to prove their respect for the natural environment (Prasad, 2013; Vij, Suri, & Singh, 2013). Company “X” implements several training and development initiatives such as awareness programmes, workshops, attitude changing programmes, job rotation, seating next to nail method, and assigning a buddy for newly join people with special focus on creating awareness on the significance of proper environmental management. Attitude changing programmes are being utilized to inspire employees to be sparing in their use of paper, electricity, water and other facilities as a moral obligation towards the environment. While the company concentrates on creating a polythene free environment within the premises, by means of job rotation and job sharing activities they have been able to reduce waste, energy, time and air pollution. By assigning a buddy and by using seating next to nail methods, the company discards the need for hiring external trainers thereby reducing the use of carbon footprint.

Facilities

Interactions between the companies are maintained through video conferencing, teleconferencing and other online applications while Skype, viber and online integrations are used when dealing with customers, suppliers, technicians and other stakeholders. In addition to that, the HR department executes a Human Resource Information System (HRIS) to handle employee personal files, to appraise performance of staff, to manage leave and salary etc. The replacement of the personal filing system with the more efficient electronic filing system has ensured their eco friendliness and assisted in creating a paperless working environment within the company.

Company identification card and salary slip

Vij, Suri, and Singh (2013) emphasized on green designs for payroll and ID cards and asserted PETG as a 100% recyclable and healthier material to produce ID cards in an ecofriendly manner. Similarly, Company “X” uses ecological material for preparing the company ID card. Even though the company “X” previously used printed paper as a payment slip, in today’s context they issue an electronic pay slip for staff members with an individualistic password for logging.

Welfare facilities

The company “X” provides hostel/boarding facilities to their manual employees and offers bungalows for executives who are working in the factory. Through this practice of providing accommodation, the company can reduce carbon emission. Moreover, the company provides free transport facilities for their staff personnel in order to condense bad consequences of using different transport methods. Vij, Suri, and Singh (2013) emphasized various modes to reduce carbon emission such as car sharing, motorcycle facilities, and encouraging the use of public transportation. Additionally, the company provides fuel efficient Hybrid cars for employees in the managerial position. Yet another practice of the company that reduces negative environmental consequences is providing the three main meals for the manual employees of the factory.

Performance management and appraisal

According to Prasad (2013) when implementing performance management systems, organizations ought to include green targets in the key performance areas. However as previously mentioned, despite a few notable positions many employees lack knowledge of green targets that should be achieved. The company however makes use of an online peer-subordinate evaluation system in which employees who are working in factories have to report to the head office when they are undertaking performance appraisals.

Other related Green practices

As a result of in-depth interviews, the researchers were able to identify various Green practices in the selected company. The selected company has already obtained ISO 14001: 2004 standards for their production process and the internal auditors of the company verify the entire production process twice a week. When considering the waste management, the company divides the system into two: solid waste and liquid waste. The solid waste is redistributed to Holcim Cement Company and 50% of liquid is reused for production purposes and the rest is discharged according to the environmental standards at waste generating points. Moreover, the company maintains a policy of planting more than 10 trees for every tree that has to be cut. In addition, the company uses roofing tiles made of clay and coir carpets within the premises. While noise pollution is controlled according to the central environmental standards and ear protecting equipment has been distributed among factory workers, air pollution has been minimized by the use of chimneys with ash filters.

Conclusion and contribution

The concept of green HR is being enthusiastically embraced by the modern commercial sector. The foremost intention of the present paper was to explore the impact of green concepts towards the human resources management arena. It was noticeable that although the selected company did practice many green concepts, they have not yet reached the scope and possibility of prominent green

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HR concepts in the world. However, considering the novelty of the concept in Sri Lanka, the performance of the selected company should be deemed satisfactory. The company attempts to go green through online advertising, tele recruitment, recyclable ID card, electronic pay slip, waste management, energy management, controlling air pollution, reducing carbon emission, CSR activities to protect the environment, online work arrangements, attitude changing programmes and awareness programmes. Moreover, the selected company uses many different forms of electronic and online methods to ensure the sustainability of their green HR practices.

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