**Green Human Resource Management: A New Model of Human Resource Management in the Aftermath of the Pandemic**

S. Gutiérrez-Broncano, J. Opute, P. Jiménez-Estévez, and M. Rubio-Andrés

**Summary**

In recent years, environmental degradation has been increasing and so has awareness of the need to implement measures to improve the environment. More and more companies are developing environmental improvement programmes as part of their business strategies. To do this in the best possible way, the management of their human resources has to be modified from the traditional practices that have been implemented for years. Green HRM offers an unbeatable and rewarding opportunity to improve the environmental performance of companies that implement it. This chapter first discusses the current situation and then defines the concept of environmental capital. This type of capital, so scarce in companies today, is what we need to generate so that companies can effectively implement their environmental improvement programmes. To this end, it is necessary to have human resources tools that are in line with these objectives. It is for this reason that the different human resources practices that companies can implement within an ecological personnel management model are explained.

**Objectives of the chapter**: To raise awareness of the situation of our environment and the need for the business world to respond to it. To define the functions and objectives that can be implemented from the human resources area to improve the environmental management programmes carried out by companies. To understand the competitive advantages that the ecological management of human resources can bring to companies. To reflect on the difficulties that can arise when implementing an ecological human resources management system.

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**1 Introduction:**

In recent years, we have experienced an excessively high level of environmental degradation with adverse effects, such as deficiencies in air quality, loss of water quality and quantity, decrease in soil quality and increase in the greenhouse effect that put both current and future generations at risk. Globalemissionsarereachingunprecedentedlevelsthatappearnottohavepeaked yet. The last four years have been the warmest on record and Arctic winter temperatures have risen by 3 °C since 1990. Sea levels are rising, coral reefs are drying up and we are beginning to see the fatal impact of climate change on health through air pollution, heat waves and food security risks. The situation is already so worrying that the United Nations created the Climate Change Conference as the supreme decision-making body of the convention, where mainly measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions are studied and approved. The impacts of climate change are being felt everywhere and are having very real consequences on people’s lives. National economies are being affected by climate change, which is costing us dearly today and will cost us even more in future. But it is beginning to be recognised that there are now affordable and scalable solutions that will allow us to make the leap to cleaner and more resilient economies. More and more companies are introducing environmental requirements into their strategic planning, mainly due to a number of factors that have influenced them in recent years. These include the following: • The existence of increasingly comprehensive, complete and precise regulations for environmental protection. • Business risk through loss of image as a result of uncontrolled pollution. • Pressure from competitors who are aware of the need to protect natural resources. • New opportunities to enter niche markets that demand environmentally friendly products. • Possibility to reduce production costs by making better use of natural resources. • Reduction of fines and penalties for non-compliance with current legislation. Green Human Resource Management … 127 • Improvement of the company’s corporate image and credibility in the market for both customers and future employees (brand employer). Organisations (including companies) must demonstrate socially responsible behaviour, not only in the economic and social sphere, but also in the environmental sphere (Server & Villalonga, 2005). Already, the Green Paper (European Commission,2001) proposed to promote a European framework for Corporate Social Responsibility with the objective that companies should voluntarily contribute to a better society and a cleaner and more sustainable environment. More and more companies are openly acknowledging their social responsibility and considering the preservation of the environment to be essential. But all this in turn poses new challenges for business management in general and for the management of its human resources in particular.

**2 Environmental Capital:**

The current environmental situation has led to the need for new knowledge and an attitude towards caring for the environment, which is what we call “environmental capital”. The environmental capital (EC) of a company incorporates a whole set of intangible resources that form a key factor for the creation of value, as well as the rest of the existing knowledge. In this case, the EC includes both the knowledge of the employees that form part of the organisation and other knowledge that, independently of the individual, is owned by the organisation. It is understood as part of the overall intellectual capital of the company, which, following the intellect model, divides intellectual capital into three main groups: human capital, structural capital and relational capital. Human environmental capital includes the knowledge possessed only by the people in the organisation and is therefore individual and tacit. In some cases, this knowledge is shared with small groups of people, a team, etc., that perform similar tasks. Following López and Avilés (2008), we find several types of knowledge. Firstly, operational knowledge would be knowledge that enables people to handle new situations of environmental adaptation, requiring both knowledge and skills. Knowledge refers to the acquisition of theoretical notions about the environment, legislation, recycling, waste treatment, environmental policy, environmental management, auditing, etc., while skills require practical handling of new machinery, practical waste separation, practical application of environmental procedures, etc. Secondly, there is the emotional knowledge, which is what allows the person to manifest him/herself as a person in the new situation of environmental adaptation. We can summarise it in the employee’s motivation to perform the tasks entrusted to him/her with respect to the environment, leadership of people working on environmental issues, and loyalty and commitment to the company’s environmental policy.128 S. Gutiérrez-Broncano et al. Structural environmental capital is a type of intellectual capital that enables the establishment of a new company structure in line with the situation with respect to external environmental requirements. It refers to the collective knowledge that is displayed by the organisation as such and includes both organisational and technological knowledge. Organisational environmental knowledge incorporates both the corporate culture supported by the implementation of an organisational environmental commitment and the establishment of an environmental policy, as well as the formal organisation, which may have to define new tasks and responsibilities (environmental managers, environmental technicians, etc.) and new specialised departments. Technological environmental knowledge makes it possible for the company to adapt to the environment through new technologies. It includes the technical experience that the company acquires over time in the environmental field, such as patents, prototypes, machines and any other resource of a technological nature. Finally, the third type of knowledge is environmental relational capital. It encompasses all those relationships that are established outside the organisation and revolve around the environment. We can distinguish between internal knowledge, which includes all the relationships that the organisation establishes with the personnel involved in the organisation and which must be involved in the established environmental culture, and, in addition, all the external knowledge that incorporates those relationships of an environmental nature that the organisation maintains with third parties and that are of utmost importance. For example, the relationship with customers to satisfy their environmental needs in terms of products and services; with suppliers, as the production chain needs to be clean and non-polluting; or with the administration, to create new relationships with the environmental administrative services. Finally, we have to incorporate market relations in terms of the environment, which will be mainly given by the establishment of new green or ecological brands or by the company’s display of its ecological labels and certificates. In this way, it will achieve an image and reputation in line with the new situation.

**3 Corporate Experiences and Actions on Environmental Practices:**

Companies such as Coca-Cola and its bottling partners have been improving water use efficiency by up to 27%intheperiod 2004–2014, becoming the first Fortune 500 company to publicly declare a goal of balancing the equivalent amount of water used in its global turnover with nature and communities (Business Wire, 2016). Using a global water use assessment endorsed by LimnoTech and Deloitte and conducted in partnership with the Nature Conservancy, Coca-Cola as a whole and its bottlers returned an estimated 191.9 billion litres of water to nature and communities in2015, through the implementation of 248 community projects in 71 countries aimed at safe access to water, watershed protection and water for productive use. These projects Green Human Resource Management … 129 also include sanitation and education, helping to improve local livelihoods, adapting to climate change, improving biodiversity and water quality, and engaging in policy and awareness raising on water issues. All in all, they manage to match the equivalent of 115% of water used in Coca-Cola beverages last year (Business Wire, 2016). In Spain alone, Coca-Cola, in order to contribute to the 6th UN Sustainable Development Goal (ODS-6: Ensure availability of water, its sustainable management and sanitation for all), is carrying out three actions: reducing the amount of water used in its beverage manufacturing process, purifying and returning the water used in hygiene and plant maintenance operations, and replenishing 100% of the water contained in its beverages in water-stressed areas (Coca-Cola, 2021). Like Coca-Cola, Unilever is also committed to ODS-6. Unilever is one of the world’s leading FMCG companies, manufacturing and selling nearly 400 brands in more than 190 countries. Using the water footprint study, it realises that almost 99% of the water consumed by households is produced when people use its products, specifically when they wash clothes, wash their hair, shower or bathe. For this reason, its research and development teams are focused on developing products that have the same performance but require less water, use less quality water or can be used without water. In addition, they also work together with their suppliers to reduce water use mainly in their crops and in the water consumption of the more than 300 factories around the world (Unilever, 2018). Unilever has a specific water committee that is in charge of the entire water strategy and water use targets. Its key role is to look for smart innovations. During the period 2010–2017, it has managed to reduce its customers’ consumption by 2%; it has saved 19.8 million cubic metres of water used in its manufacturing operations and has drawn up a sustainable agriculture code that has served to guide and develop more than 4,000 projects to improve water management with its suppliers (Unilever, 2021). On the other hand, companies such as Nestlé are also committed to water management, focusing their actions on reducing the amount of water used for each kilo of food and drink they produce. An example of this is the water savings to be achieved by the new water treatment plant at its Tri An factory in Vietnam, which will achieve a reduction of 36,000 cubic metres of water per year, i.e. 30% less. It also carries out activities to ensure that the company respects local water resources, ensures that water is returned to the environment as clean as possible, works in collaboration with its suppliers to promote the conservation of this resource and collaborates with other actors in society to improve conservation and access to water. Among its main achievements, it has designed a new system that has enabled a 53% reduction in the consumption of water for cooling industrial processes, thus reducing total consumption by 23%. In addition, and in line with its corporate social responsibility policy, Nestlé has been consistent in its efforts to reduce its environmental impact, with its indicators of water and energy use per tonne of product produced improving day by day. A few years ago, Nestlé opened its most water-efficient factory in Mexico, implementing measures that the company intends to replicate at other production sites around the world. The “Zero Water” dairy factory takes fresh cow’s milk, which contains 88% water, and then heats it at low pressure. The steam produced is130 S. Gutiérrez-Broncano et al. condensed to a liquid state, treated and used to clean the evaporation machines. Once the machines are washed, the water is collected again, purified and recycled for a second use. This water can then be reused for watering gardens or cleaning. The reuse of milk water in this case eliminates the need to extract water from the ground (Nestlé, 2020). Nestlé currently has more than 170 water management projects in its factories, saving 3.6 million cubic metres, recycling 6.7 million cubic metres of water for reuse in other operations and reducing water use by 33.3% per tonne of production.

**4 The Impact of Environmental Capital on Human Resource Management:**

Intellectual capital has a major impact on the management of the company and in particular on the management of its human resources. The emergence of a body of environmental knowledge implies the transformation of company structures, the modification of jobs, the emergence of new professional skills, the need for new professionals and the establishment of “ad hoc” training plans. We cannot forget that human resources are the main agents transforming the environment and that they can have both favourable and unfavourable impacts on the environment. This makes good environmental training essential. Having knowledge about the handling of solid and liquid waste, rules and procedures established in the workplace with respect to environmental issues, the creation of indicators that measure the evaluation of the environmental dimension, etc., will serve to strengthen the environmental management of the company through training. Not only training, but all human resource management procedures will have to be adjusted to environmental criteria, whether for companies wishing to comply with legal environmental requirements or for those wishing to implement environmental management systems. Other modifications with respect to traditional human resource management practices (due to the incorporation in companies of the environmental conditioning factors that society demands) will be those related to the analysis of working conditions and production processes, the qualifications required of workers, recruitment and selection systems including new environmental items, extra-salary compensation, the creation of environmental training programmes for both employees and managers, etc. (López & Avilés, 2008).

**5 Green Human Resource Management:**

An Effective Tool This new dynamic opens the door to new lines of collaboration between the business sphere and the improvement of the environment, thus favouring the results achieved Green Human Resource Management … 131 through CSR actions. However, for practices such as those carried out by Coca-Cola, Unilever or Nestlé to be effective, it is not only necessary to comply with the formal rules established by the company, but also to obtain a commitment from employees to accept these initiatives on a voluntary basis. Companies need to implement management systems that impact on the environmental attitudes of their employees if they are to implement all these activities effectively (Renwick et al., 2013, 2015). HRM has made great progress in recent years mainly due to the improved utilisation of all the human capital at its disposal. The increased involvement of employees in decision-making has brought significant change and improvement in terms of the development of new skills, knowledge and attitudes (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2009; Singh & El-Kassar, 2019). This increased participation coupled with greater awareness of environmental management and better use of resources (Cavicchi, 2017; Phillips, 2018; Roos&O’Connor,2015) has meant that human resource management has had to adapt to better contribute to the development of companies’ environmental capital. Green human resource management (GHRM) refers to human resource practices aimedattheenvironmentalandecologicalinfluenceofcompaniesandislinkedtothe company’s environmental strategy and employees’ green behaviours (Renwicketal., 2015). GHRM is part of the literature on sustainable human resource management and focuses on companies’ environmental management practices, where green HRM acts as a platform for company’s environmental management activities (Dumont et al., 2017; Masri & Jaaron, 2017). Therefore, GHRM reflects the organisation’s strategic orientation towards environmental protection and asks top management to pay attention to the organisation’s processes and practices and to encourage people to engage in green work behaviours to reduce environmental pollution in the workplace (Berrone & Gomez-Mejia, 2009; Mishra et al., 2014; Oh et al., 2016). In other words, GHRM encompasses the incorporation of the organisation’s green management objectives into HR processes, i.e. recruitment and selection, training and development, performance management and appraisal, rewards and recognition (Muller-Carmem et al., 2010; Renwick et al., 2008). GHRM has emerged in response to this business and societal demand. These people management practices are seen as essential to the successful implementation of green strategies and environmental management practices (Daily & Huang, 2001; Renwick et al., 2013). Reng et al. (2017) describe GHRM as a phenomenon relevant to understanding the relationship between activities that have an impact on the natural environment and the design, evolution, implementation and influence of HRM systems put in place by companies. Nowadays, all the programmes, processes and techniques of ecological human resource management that companies manage to implement seek to reduce negative environmental impacts and increase positive impacts. Their ultimate goal is to improve the sustainable environmental performance of the organisation. To achieve this, they implement certain practices such as green job analysis and design that includes tasks related to environmental protection; green recruitment and selection, attracting and selecting new employees according to environmental criteria; green training and coaching, developing training programmes focusing on132 S. Gutiérrez-Broncano et al. environmentally friendly practices and encouraging employee turnover so that future managers take into account environmental impacts in their decisions; green reward management, introducing rewards for initiatives that improve environmental management; green performance evaluation, incorporating environmental objectives among the challenges to be achieved by work teams, etc. Arulrajah et al. (2015) after analysing different GHRM practices concluded that companies can improve their environmental performance in a more sustainable way than before and suggest that more and more companies implement such practices. These HR practices aim to make employees more environmentally conscious. In the following sections, we can look at the different practices that companies can implement to achieve this. 5.1 Design and Analysis of Green Jobs • Incorporate tasks, roles and responsibilities in each task to protect the environment. • Include environmental requirements in job descriptions. • Use cross-functional teams incorporating people with environmental training. • Include the environmental dimension as an obligation in job descriptions. • Include environmental management competencies in specific jobs. • Design and implement new jobs and positions that focus exclusively on environmental management. 5.2 Green Human Resource Planning • Forecast the number of employees required for the implementation of environmental management programmes. • Commit to develop strategies that anticipate the demand for environmental jobs (consultants, energy development experts…). 5.3 Green Recruitment • Visibilise the environmental results achieved when trying to attract candidates. • Incorporate environmental criteria in recruitment messages. • Communicating the organisation’s commitment to environmental management in recruitment. • Reflect environmental policy in recruitment policy. • Express certain environmental values in the company’s vacancy announcement. • Express the organisation’s preference for recruiting candidates with the skills and attitudes to participate in environmental management initiatives. Green Human Resource Management … 133 5.4 Green Selection • Consider environmental concerns as a selection criterion. • Ask environmentally related questions in candidate interviews. • Select candidates who are sufficiently committed to the environment. • Select candidates who are committed to responsible and ecological consumption in their private life. 5.5 Green Socialisation • Provide a general environmental induction. • Provide a job-specific environmental induction. • Develop new employees’ familiarity with environmental issues. • Develop socialisation programmes that encourage greener employee behaviour. 5.6 Green Performance Evaluation • Establish an environmental management information system. • Incorporate environmental management objectives into the company’s appraisal system. • Install environmental performance standards and norms (including task and targets) across the organisation. • Integrate green criteria into employee appraisals following environmentally related criteria. • Include an interview to convey progress in achieving environmental performance. • Provide regular feedback to employees and teams to achieve environmental targets and improve environmental performance. • Introduce or formally evaluate all positions on their environmental performance (if possible). 5.7 Green Training and Development • Provide training to learn how to adapt to an environmentally friendly environment through good practices. • Promote environmental awareness among the workforce. • Promote training to enable staff to carry out their own environmental analysis. • Apply job rotation to train future green managers. • Imparting green knowledge and skills. • Identify green training needs of employees.134 S. Gutiérrez-Broncano et al. • Conduct serious and systematic environmental management training programmes. • Provide opportunities for everyone to be trained in environmental management issues. 5.8 Green Rewards Management • Rewarding environmental performance. • Rewarding good environmental performance financially. • Reward good environmental performance in kind. • Reward excellence of teams with good environmental performance. • Introduce rewards for innovative environmental improvement initiatives. • Communicate environmental excellence achieved to the employee. • Provide incentives for commitment to environmentally friendly activities and behaviours. • Reward the acquisition of environmental skills. 5.9 Green Health and Safety Management • Ensure a green workplace for everyone. • Create environmentally related initiatives to reduce employee stress and occupational illnesses caused by a hazardous work environment. • Creating and implementing strategies to maintain a conducive environmental environment to prevent employee health and safety issues. 5.10 Ecological Management of Employee Discipline • Establishing penalties for non-compliance with environmental management objectives. • Sanctioning or dismissing for environmental management violations to be guided by established disciplinary procedures of the organisation. • Formulate and publish standards of conduct related to environmental care. • Develop a progressive disciplinary system to discipline employees who violate environmental rules of conduct. 5.11 Green Labour Relations • Provide employee opportunities through unions to participate in environmental improvement suggestions. Green Human Resource Management … 135 Fig. 1 Process of implementing a green HR management system (Source Adapted from Ang, 2017) • Provide training for representatives on environmental management. • Recognise unions (and members of the works council, if applicable) as class players in environmental management. • Provide unions with opportunities to negotiate with management on green workplace agreements. As can be seen, there is a whole list of human resource management practices aimed at environmental improvement that companies can incorporate. In many cases, it is up to top management to promote and support these initiatives, but there is still little predisposition on the part of managers to implement practices such as those described in the previous tables. For this to happen, a paradigm shift is needed among managers and in society at large. And this requires a gradual implementation as can be seen in the following graph (Fig. 1).

**6 Conclusions:**

In this chapter, we have demonstrated the great role that companies have in contributing to the creation and development of environmental capital in their organisations and thus responding to a great need of a social nature. The ecological management of human resources is presented as a suitable alternative that favours the increase of the company’s environmental capital. Additionally, this also contributes to the implementation of environmental programmes that help to preserve the environment in a more effective and enduring way and in essence fulfilling the objectives of the chapter. We should be aware that when employees are given the opportunity to participate in environmental issues and are highly motivated as a result of good human resource management oriented towards environmental performance, they are highly willing to voluntarily participate in environmental projects, thus contributing to improving not only environmental aspects, but also the company’s reputation and even financial performance (Pham et al., 2019). To achieve this, the commitment of top management needs to be strong and forceful. The study by Kim et al. (2019) shows that organisational commitment is a determinant of individual employee behaviour. Employees are more driven to act in136 S. Gutiérrez-Broncano et al. pursuit of their company’s environmental goal when it is integrated into their values. GHRM practices are perceived by employees as a positive organisational gesture that reflects a genuine concern for the environment and thus, the employee feels more willing to show a higher level of organisational commitment to the company (Paillé et al., 2014). Mention should also be made of the efforts of some multinational organisations such as Coca-Cola, Unilever and Nestle (earlier referred to) as examples of organisations worth emulating in improving the environment capital. Finally, it is worth highlighting the key role of the transformational leader as an antecedent of GHRM in promoting eco-innovation and improving the environmental performance of the company (Singh et al., 2020).

**7 Self-Assessment Exercises**

1. 2. 3. 4. 5. Identify a company that carries out environmental management projects; does it have the human capital to implement such projects; what human resource practices should it use to achieve better results; is the top management involved and committed to these practices; if not, establish a plan to implement green human resource management; if not, establish a plan to implement green human resource management; if not, establish a plan to implement green human resource management; if not, establish a plan to implement green human resource management. If not, set out a plan for implementing green human resource management. What do you think would be the best arguments to make your staff aware of the need to implement green HRM practices, what barriers would you encounter, how would you manage to reduce these barriers? Justify your answer. At what stage would you involve the unions or works council in any environmental project? Why is their participation and engagement important? Rank from most to least complex in your opinion when it comes to implementing the green HRM practices discussed in this topic. As a human resources manager in a company, what three advantages and three disadvantages do you consider the implementation of a green HRM programme to have?

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