

# Defining Green and Green Human Resource Management: A Conceptual Study

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## **Abstract**

*A systematic study was carried out with regard to defining the terms Green and Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) owing to little research done conceptually, in particular a gap in the theoretical knowledge of defining 'Green' and GHRM in a synthesized form and intellectual curiosity. Objectives of the study were (1) to explore the definitions given by the main dictionaries and the New Oxford Thesaurus of English, and the researchers with regard to the term 'Green' and present them to create a reasonable interpretation of the term; (2) to explore the definitions given by the researchers with regard to the term 'GHRM' and present them to create a reasonable interpretation of the concept of GHRM; and (3) to identify and present characteristics of GHRM based on the definitions examined under the study. The desk research strategy was applied to achieve the three objectives. Four interpretations could be derived from the dictionary definitions relating to Green. Based on the research papers it was found that the term Green has four spheres of meaning and further the term 'Green' in management refers to environmental or eco-activities. Six sources of defining GHRM which were examined resulted in seven interpretations. Finally the examination of the essence of the definitions revealed ten characteristics of GHRM.*

**Keywords:** Human Resource Management, Green, Green Human Resource Management

## **Introduction**

Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) is an emerging field or branch of Human Resource Management (HRM) which is a profound field of organizational management and is a subject or work that is essential for all types of managers working in any organization irrespective of their fields of specialization and interest. GHRM is relatively a new phenomenon in the academic world as well as the practical world of HRM and managing organizations. Still popular textbooks on HRM do not have a special treatment on GHRM as a main topic or a concept. An examination of curriculums of HRM degree programs and professional programs available to the authors reveals that there is no separate course that delivers knowledge, skills, and attitudes in respect of GHRM. Perhaps a major reason for this state is that a specialized body of knowledge in respect of GHRM has not yet developed through rationalism and empiricism. It is possible to notice that some scholars and academicians seem to have exhibited a keen interest in exploring, describing, and explaining this novel concept. Little research has been done with regard to exploring various existent definitions of 'Green' and GHRM. In particular it reveals a gap in the theoretical knowledge of defining 'Green' and GHRM in a synthesized form. In addition, there is an intellectual curiosity arose within us to know various definitions of 'Green' and GHRM.

## **Research Questions and Objectives**

A systematic attempt was made to find answers for the following research questions:

1. What are the definitions available in respect of 'Green'?
2. What are the definitions given by various researchers with regard to GHRM?
3. What are the characteristics of GHRM that can be derived from the analysis of the definitions examined under the study?

This paper is a conceptual paper and the objectives of the study which are consistent with the above mentioned research questions are:

1. To explore the definitions given by the main dictionaries and the New Oxford Thesaurus of English, and the researchers with regard to the term 'Green' and present them to create a reasonable interpretation of the term.
2. To explore the definitions given by the researchers with regard to the term 'GHRM' and present them to create a reasonable interpretation of the concept of GHRM.
3. To identify and present characteristics of GHRM based on the definitions examined under the study.

## **Method**

As this is an attempt to answer the above mentioned three research questions, a desk research was conducted. The desk research included a methodological review of existent literature available to the authors. This method was appropriate to achieve the objectives of the study. It was mainly based on well known dictionaries, the New Oxford Thesaurus of English, scholar books, one textbook, and research papers available in the databases.

## Green

The first research question of the study is: *What are the definitions available in respect of 'Green'?* First an attempt was made to explore definitions given by the main dictionaries and the New Oxford Thesaurus of English in respect of 'Green', and then by various researchers in their publications which were available to the authors. The Oxford Paperback Dictionary (1979) defines 'green' (1) as the colour between blue and yellow; (2) the colour of growing grass; (3) covered with grass or with growing leaves; (4) unripe, not seasoned; (5) immature, inexperienced, easily deceived; and (6) pale and sickly-looking. The dictionary has five meanings. The Collins Birmingham University English Language Dictionary (1987) defines 'green' (1) as the colour of grass or leaves or leafy or verdant; (2) as an area of land covered with grass, plants, and trees and with not houses or factories; (3) a person with very little experience; (4) unripe and not ready to be eaten (fruits); and (5) political movements whose members are particularly concerned about protecting the environment. According to the dictionary, the term *Green* has five meanings four of which are similar with the meanings given by the Oxford Paperback Dictionary. The fifth meaning given by the Collins Birmingham University English Language Dictionary has reference to protecting the environment. Here the environment is the natural environment, not other types of environment with which managers are familiar with, i.e. business environment, internal environment, external environment, and managerial environment. The New Oxford Thesaurus of English (2000) presents several meanings such as (1) verdant (grassy, grass-covered, leafy, verdurous, rural, pastoral (opposite: barren); (2) environmentally friendly; (3) unripe; (4) unseasoned (not aged, unfinished); (5) raw (fresh); (6) inexperienced; naive; and (7) vivid (fresh, flourishing); vigorous (strong, healthy); and pale (wan, grey, whitish) to the term green. The same defines "green as a noun" as (1) foliage (greenery, plants, leaves, vegetation); (2) lawn (grassy area), and (3) environmentalist (conservationist, preservationist, nature-lover, or eco-activist). The Thesaurus of English gives at least seven meanings to the term *Green* as an adjective and the second meaning is environmentally friendly. The three meanings given by the same to the term *Green* as a noun are related to the environment that is natural. The seventh edition of Oxford English Mini Dictionary (2007) gives four meanings to the term 'Green' and they are: (1) of a colour like that of grass; (2) covered with grass; (3) concerned with protecting the environment; and (4) inexperienced or naïve. Thus, green is the colour of grasses which are short plants with long narrow leaves, greenery that is green plants or leaves, keeping safe from harm to the environment (natural); or a person who lacks experience or judgment.

Based on the above dictionary definitions there are several meanings of the term 'Green' and however its meaning has more concern with the natural environment. Following interpretations can be derived from the dictionary definitions relating to Green:

1. An area of land covered with grass, plants, and trees and with not houses or factories
2. A movement for protecting the natural environment
3. A human quality of being environmentally friendly
4. A human being who is an environmentalist

An attempt was made to find definitions given by researchers in HRM in respect of the term *Green* and surprisingly it was not possible to find such specific definitions from the papers examined by the authors of this paper (they were not mentioned under the references as they had not been utilized for

writing this paper) except two conceptual papers published by the first author of this paper and a paper written by Farid and El-Sawalhy (2018). A conceptual research paper published by Opatha (2013) presents four meanings in the context of managing people at work/HRM. Opatha (2013, p. 13) defines:

‘Green’ means environmental. ‘Green’ or ‘Greening’ has at least four meanings in the context of managing people at work/Human Resource Management (HRM).

1. *Preservation of the natural environment*: all the things in the world which are neither caused nor controlled by human beings and they include land, forests, plants, animals, and other natural phenomena are referred to as the natural environment. To keep it in its original form and protect it from harm, loss, or negative change.
2. *Conservation of the natural environment*: to be very careful in the way of using it in order to let it last as long as possible, to use it at the minimum level so that future generations will be able to utilize it.
3. *Avoidance or minimization of environmental pollution*: to stop contaminating the water, air, atmosphere, etc. through unpleasant and poisonous substances and wastes. To guard against outcomes that will ultimately endanger the planet/earth where humans and non-humans are living.
4. *Generation of gardens and looking-like natural places*: to create parks and places which have plants, trees, and grass.

An expanded version (written by Opatha and Arulrajah, 2014) of the above mentioned conceptual paper presents reiteration of the same meanings of the term Green. Thus, the term *Green* has four domains or spheres of meaning that include preservation of the natural environment (safeguarding the natural environment); conservation of the natural environment (being careful in using the natural environment); avoidance or minimization of environmental pollution (stopping or alleviating of contamination of the planet); and generation of gardens and looking-like natural places (building new places which look like the nature purposefully). The term ‘Green’ in management refers to environmental or eco-activities (Farid and El-Sawalhy (2018). According to these two authors the term ‘Green’ is used in the discipline of management to give a meaning which is something related to environmental or eco-actions. Exhibit-1 gives the meanings of the term *Green* discussed so far.

**Exhibit -1: The Meanings of the Term Green**

Source	Definitions
The Oxford Paperback Dictionary (1979)	(1) the colour between blue and yellow; (2) the colour of growing grass; (3) covered with grass or with growing leaves; (4) unripe, not seasoned; (5) immature, inexperienced, easily deceived; and (6) pale and sickly-looking
The Collins Birmingham University English Language Dictionary (1987)	(1) the colour of grass or leaves or leafy or verdant; (2) an area of land covered with grass, plants, and trees and with not houses or factories; (3) a person with very little experience; (4) unripe and not ready to be eaten (fruits); and (5) political movements whose members are particularly concerned about protecting the environment
The New Oxford Thesaurus of English (2000)	As an adjective (1) verdant (grassy, grass-covered, leafy, verdurous, rural, pastoral (opposite: barren); (2) environmentally friendly; (3) unripe; (4) unseasoned (not aged, unfinished); (5) raw (fresh); (6) inexperienced; naive; (7) vivid (fresh, flourishing); vigorous (strong, healthy); and pale (wan, grey, whitish) to the term green  As a noun (1) foliage (greenery, plants, leaves, vegetation); (2) lawn (grassy area), and (3) environmentalist (conservationist, preservationist, nature-lover, or eco-activist)
Oxford English Mini Dictionary (2007)	(1) of a colour like that of grass; (2) covered with grass; (3) concerned with protecting the environment; and (4) inexperienced or naïve
Opatha (2013); and Opatha and Arulrajah (2014)	1. Preservation of the natural environment 2. Conservation of the natural environment 3. Avoidance or minimization of environmental pollution 4. Generation of gardens and looking-like natural places
Farid and El-Sawalhy (2018)	The term 'Green' in management refers to environmental or eco-activities

**Green HRM**

The second research question of the study is: *What are the definitions given by various researchers with regard to GHRM?* An attempt was made to find out definitions given by relevant researchers through a comprehensive examination of literature available to the authors. It was a surprise to reveal that the number of distinct definitions of HRM given by relevant researchers was less than the number of research papers published. Perhaps it is the reason that majority of researchers concentrated on

exploring, describing, and explaining the contents of GHRM, relationships and empirical impact of various green HRM functions with and on certain organizational outcomes. Another reason might be that they considered defining GHRM as less important than other aspects of HRM. The authors of this paper were interested in finding lucid definitions of GHRM from the existent literature and found only few definitions which are lucid. According to the Collins Birmingham University English Language Dictionary (1987), 'lucid' means written in a way which is clear and easy to understand (comprehensible).

In 2013 Renwick, Redman and Maguire have defined GHRM as the integration of Corporate Environmental Management into HRM. According to Wehrmeyer (1996, p.12) environmental management is defined as *"the co-ordinated and organised approach to issues relating to the natural environment, from a business perspective with the aim of reducing those impacts deemed harmful to the natural environment. This includes the identification, documentation and elimination of these environmental effects."* Environmental management is concerned with minimizing and avoiding harmful effects of business works in the organization to the natural environment. HRM is the discipline and practice of managing people at work efficiently and effectively in order to achieve goals of an organization (Opatha, 2019). When environmental management is combined with HRM so that they become closely linked, GHRM gets created. According to Jabbour, Santos and Nagano (2010) GHRM was defined as the greening of functional dimensions of HRM such as job description and analysis, recruitment, selection, training, performance appraisal and rewards. It was observed that they utilized functional perspective to defining GHRM and when HRM functions such as job analysis, recruitment, selection, training, performance evaluation, pay management, incentives management, and benefits management become incorporated with greening GHRM exists.

Opatha (2013, p.28) defines: *"Green HRM is referred to all the activities involved in development, implementation and on-going maintenance of a system that aims at making employees of an organization green. It is the side of HRM that is concerned with transforming normal employees into green employees so as to achieve environmental goals of the organization and finally to make a significant contribution to environmental sustainability. It refers to the policies, practices and systems that make employees of the organization green for the benefit of the individual, society, natural environment, and the business."* GHRM includes a system of making normal employees into green employees and this system has to be developed, implemented, and maintained continuously in order to achieve environmental goals of the organization. GHRM is beneficial for the employee, people in the society, natural environment, and the business organization. By presenting analytical and theoretical perspectives on GHRM Arulrajah and Opatha (2016, p.152) define GHRM as the environmental (green) orientation of all human resource functions or practices of an organization at all levels. Further they define that the GHRM deals with rethinking the basic concepts of HRM, its objectives, functions, processes, activities, and strategies in an environmentally friendly manner in order to accommodate the needs of ecological sustainability. Thus GHRM involves making HRM functions green oriented to meet the needs of ecological sustainability.

GHRM is part of a broader framework of corporate social responsibility and means the application of HR policies to promote sustainable use of company resources and to support ecology; and its primary objective is to develop ecological sensitivity in employees and to make them aware of how their own

behaviour may affect the environment (Bombiak and Marciniuk-Kluska, 2018). According to these two researchers, GHRM is an integral part of corporate social responsibility and it includes application of HR policies for promoting use of organizational resources in a sustainable way and supporting ecology. Ecology is the pattern and balance of relationships between plants, animals, people and their environment in a particular region (the Collins Birmingham University English Language Dictionary, 1987).

The purpose of GHRM is to create, enhance and retain greening within each employee of the organization so that he or she gives a maximum individual contribution on each of the four roles, i.e., preservationist, conservationist, non-polluter, and maker (Opatha, 2013; Opatha and Arulrajah, 2014); and GHRM is a field of sustainable HRM which *is that part of Human Resource Management which is concerned with Planet-related matters, Society-related matters and Profit-related matters. Its aim is to maximize environmental, social, and economic performance of the organization. It refers to the policies, procedures, rules, practices, and systems of managing employees which contribute to achieve sustainability* (Opatha, 2019, p. 31). GHRM is concerned with planet-related matters such as green roles of employee, green HRM functions, green attitude and behaviour, and green performance of job (Opatha, 2019).

Based on the above definitions it is possible to conclude that they are not significantly different and furthermore they have no contradictions with each other. Following interpretations can be derived from the definitions relating to GHRM examined:

1. A creation of integrating of environmental management into HRM
2. An approach to make functional dimensions of HRM green
3. A set of activities involved in development, implementation and on-going maintenance of a system that aims at making employees of an organization green
4. A set of policies, practices and systems that make employees of the organization green for the benefit of the individual, society, natural environment, and the business
5. An attempt of rethinking the basic concepts of HRM, its objectives, functions, processes, activities, and strategies in an environmentally friendly manner in order to accommodate the needs of ecological sustainability
6. An integral part of a broader framework of corporate social responsibility
7. An application of HR policies in promoting sustainable use of organizational resources and supporting ecology

Exhibit-2 gives the meanings of the term Green HRM discussed so far.

**Exhibit -2: The Definitions of the Term GHRM**

Source	Definitions
Renwick, Redman and Maguire (2013)	The integration of Corporate Environmental Management into HRM
Jabbour, Santos and Nagano (2010)	The greening of functional dimensions of HRM such as job description and analysis, recruitment, selection, training, performance appraisal and rewards
Opatha (2013)	All the activities involved in development, implementation and on-going maintenance of a system that aims at making employees of an organization green. It is the side of HRM that is concerned with transforming normal employees into green employees so as to achieve environmental goals of the organization and finally to make a significant contribution to environmental sustainability. It refers to the policies, practices and systems that make employees of the organization green for the benefit of the individual, society, natural environment, and the business
Arulrajah and Opatha (2016)	The environmental (green) orientation of all human resource functions or practices of an organization at all levels; Rethinking the basic concepts of HRM, its objectives, functions, processes, activities, and strategies in an environmentally friendly manner in order to accommodate the needs of ecological sustainability
Bombiak and Marciniuk-Kluska (2018)	The application of HR policies to promote sustainable use of company resources and to support ecology; and its primary objective is to develop ecological sensitivity in employees and to make them aware of how their own behaviour may affect the environment
Opatha (2019)	Concerned with planet-related matters such as green roles of employee, green HRM functions, green attitude and behaviour, and green performance of job

**Characteristics of Green HRM**

The third research question of the study is: *To identify and present characteristics of GHRM based on the definitions examined under the study?* Exhibit-2 has six sources of giving definitions of GHRM and an attempt was made to examine the essence of the definitions in order to identify characteristics of GHRM. Identified characteristics are:

1. GHRM is a domain of HRM.
2. It is the result of integration of environmental management into HRM.
3. It includes greening of HRM functions.
4. It is a system of transforming normal employees in an organization into green employees.
5. It is for the benefit of the individual, society, natural environment, and the business.
6. It has policies, procedures, and practices which influence greening of employees.
7. It focuses on protection and enhancement of the natural environment through managing people at work.
8. It applies policies to support ecology.
9. It applies policies to promote sustainable use of organizational resources.
10. Its concern is with planet-related matters such as green roles of employee, green HRM functions, green attitude and behaviour, and green performance of job.

Thus we emphasize that all the organizations should have employees who are environmentally friendly not only at the work life but also at personal aspects of life. In fact employees in any organization need to be competent in greening, motivated to be green, committed to greening, and involved in greening. In order to realize this, GHRM is indispensable. It is the application of policies, procedures, and practices which make employees competent ingreening, motivated to be green, committed to greening, and involved in greening. We argue that it is possible for the organization to do the following:

1. To get green people as new employees to the organization.
2. To retain more appropriate employees in terms of greening.
3. To get and improve engagement of employees in greening.
4. To motivate employees towards greening.
5. To enhance job satisfaction of employees through greening.
6. To control the cost and wastes through greening of employees.
7. To achieve a competitive advantage to the business through having green employees and green management of employees.

Of course the above mentioned ‘things to do’ need to be performed in addition to other traditional requirements of the organization such as enhancing employee productivity, employee development, legal compliance, quality of work life, and profitability of the organization.

### **Conclusion**

Greening in the context of HRM has become an increasing concern of both academicians and practicing managers in HRM. A desk research was carried out systematically to find answers for three research questions: (1) what are the definitions available in respect of ‘Green’? (2) what are the definitions given by various researchers with regard to GHRM? and (3) what are the characteristics of GHRM that can be derived from the analysis of the definitions examined under the study? Interpretations which could be derived from the dictionary definitions relating to *Green* include an area of land covered with grass, plants, and trees and with not houses or factories; a movement for protecting the natural environment; a human quality of being environmentally friendly; and a human being who is an environmentalist. Based on the research papers it was found that the term *Green* has four spheres of meaning that include preservation of the natural environment; conservation of the natural environment; avoidance or minimization of environmental pollution; and generation of gardens and looking-like natural places; and further the term ‘Green’ in management refers to environmental or eco-activities. Six sources of defining GHRM were examined resulting in interpretations, i.e. a creation of integrating of environmental management into HRM; an approach to make functional dimensions of HRM green; a set of activities involved in development, implementation and on-going maintenance of a system that aims at making employees of an organization green; a set of policies, practices and systems that make employees of the organization green for the benefit of the individual, society, natural environment, and the business; an attempt of rethinking the basic concepts of HRM, its objectives, functions, processes, activities, and strategies in an environmentally friendly manner in order to accommodate the needs of ecological sustainability; an integral part of a broader framework of corporate social responsibility; and an application of HR policies in promoting sustainable use of organizational resources and supporting ecology. Finally the attempt that was made to examine the

essence of the definitions in order to identify characteristics of GHRM resulted in listing ten characteristics of GHRM.

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