

## IMPLEMENTATION OF GREEN HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN SMEs: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES TO ENHANCE BUSINESS SUSTAINABILITY

Rr. Indah Permata Sari<sup>1\*</sup>, Briyan Cadalora Putra<sup>2</sup>, Dhuihitta Mahardhika  
Lakshita<sup>3</sup>, Dien Ajeng Fauziah<sup>4</sup>, Umami Sa'adah<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1,2,3,4,5</sup>University of Bhayangkara Surabaya, Indonesia

[\\*rr.indahpermatasari@ubhara.ac.id](mailto:rr.indahpermatasari@ubhara.ac.id)

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### ABSTRACT

*This research examines the implementation of Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) in the context of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), focusing on the challenges and opportunities faced in improving business sustainability. GHRM, which includes HR policies and practices that support environmental sustainability goals, has great potential to improve the operational efficiency and competitiveness of SMEs. However, many SMEs face barriers such as limited resources, lack of understanding of sustainability, and resistance to change. This study employs a qualitative approach, utilizing case studies of SMEs that have adopted or are planning to implement GHRM. The findings indicate that, despite persistent challenges, significant opportunities exist for enhancing business sustainability, efficiency, and corporate image through GHRM implementation. GHRM practices are anticipated to contribute to cost reduction, talent attraction, and adherence to increasingly stringent environmental regulations. This research offers recommendations for SMEs to integrate sustainability policies into HR management, thereby fortifying long-term sustainability.*

**Keywords:** Green Human Resource Management (GHRM), Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), Business Sustainability, Operational Efficiency, Challenges and Opportunities

### INTRODUCTION

In the current era, marked by a mounting focus on sustainability issues, Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) has emerged as a strategic approach to integrating environmental sustainability aspects in human resource management (HRM) practices. GHRM refers to HR policies and practices that support an organization's sustainability goals, including carbon footprint reduction, energy efficiency, and sustainable management of waste and natural resources (Nulkar, 2019). This concept is of increasing importance for organizations that wish to maintain competitiveness in a global market that increasingly demands environmentally friendly business practices.

However, the implementation of GHRM in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) is often encumbered by a number of challenges. SMEs, while contributing significantly to the global economy, are often limited in terms of resources, knowledge, and policies that support the implementation of GHRM (Miah et al., 2024). This challenge is further complicated by the high costs associated with green technologies and limited awareness of the importance of sustainability in HR practices. Nevertheless, the implementation of GHRM offers a range of opportunities, including reduced operational costs through energy efficiency, an improved corporate image in the eyes of consumers, as well as the ability to attract talent that is more concerned with sustainability. This research therefore focuses on the challenges and opportunities faced by SMEs in implementing GHRM, as well as how this can contribute to improving the sustainability of their businesses.

GHRM is a concept that encompasses HR policies and practices aimed at achieving environmental and social sustainability objectives, thereby facilitating the

long-term growth of the company Jabbour & De Sousa Jabbour (2016). GHRM practices include the recruitment of environmentally conscious employees, the provision of sustainability training, and the implementation of performance management systems that support the company's green policies. Small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are critical to the economic well-being of many nations. According to the Moursellas et al., (2023), SMEs significantly contribute to gross domestic product (GDP) and employment opportunities. However, SMEs frequently encounter obstacles in terms of resources and capacity to adopt technologies or policies that support sustainability (Yadav et al., 2018). Business sustainability is a multifaceted concept that extends beyond the pursuit of economic returns to encompass the social and environmental ramifications of business operations. The implementation of GHRM can assist companies in reducing their carbon footprint, enhancing operational efficiency, and improving their public image among consumers, who are progressively attentive to environmental concerns (Renwick et al., 2013).

A growing awareness of the importance of sustainability among consumers, employees, and increasingly stringent government regulations in terms of environmental protection has prompted many companies to adopt more environmentally friendly practices. However, a considerable gap exists between the need and ability to optimally implement Green HRM practices among small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), especially in developing countries. SMEs are often hindered by limited human resources, unsupportive infrastructure, and a lack of knowledge regarding Green HRM. In this context, while GHRM holds considerable potential to assist SMEs in enhancing their sustainability, many SMEs have yet to fully actualize this potential or develop the capacity to overcome the associated challenges. This phenomenon prompts the question of how SMEs can leverage GHRM to enhance their competitiveness in a market that is progressively prioritizing sustainability.

Despite the ample research conducted on the subject of GHRM in the context of large companies, the implementation of GHRM in SMEs remains a relatively understudied area. Previous studies have predominantly focused on large companies or specific industry sectors. This research aims to address this lacuna by offering insights into the challenges and opportunities encountered by SMEs in implementing GHRM, as well as its impact on their business sustainability. This research makes a novel contribution by examining the implementation of GHRM in the context of SMEs, a subject that has not been extensively researched. By examining the challenges SMEs face in implementing GHRM and exploring the opportunities that exist, this research is expected to provide useful recommendations for SMEs to optimize their business sustainability potential through environmentally friendly HRM.

A number of studies have been conducted on the subject of Green HRM and its relationship to organizational sustainability. Renwick et al., (2013) study is particularly noteworthy, as it was among the first to examine the relationship between Green HRM and organizational sustainability. Their findings suggested that GHRM practices contribute to the sustainability of large companies. However, the research on this topic is still limited, particularly in the context of SMEs. Jabbour & De Sousa renwiour (2016) explored the impact of GHRM implementation in large organizations in Brazil and suggested that the implementation of GHRM in SMEs would face constraints related to resources and infrastructure. Yadav et al., (2018) suggested that SMEs tend to adopt a simpler and more pragmatic approach to sustainability, which can be referenced in this study.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This research employs a qualitative research method with a literature review approach (Creswell, 2021). This method was selected because the primary objective of the research is to explore and analyze in depth the concepts, challenges, opportunities, and impacts of implementing Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) in the context of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). The literature review approach enabled the researcher to explore various previous studies, relevant theories, and existing empirical findings regarding the implementation of GHRM in SMEs. This research did not involve primary data collection through surveys or interviews; instead, it relied on analysis of existing journals, articles, and reports to gain a more comprehensive and systematic understanding of the issues under study.

The thematic analysis technique was employed to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) that emerged from the analyzed literature. This technique was used to examine the application of Green Human Resource Management in SMEs, the challenges faced, and the opportunities that arise. A comprehensive review of all selected articles was conducted to understand the general context. In this study, descriptive analysis will be used to describe in detail the challenges, opportunities, and impacts found in the literature related to the implementation of GHRM in SMEs. This description will involve the formulation of a narrative that organizes the results of the analysis based on topics relevant to the research, such as energy management, waste reduction, sustainability policy development, and employee training on green practices. The data used in this research comes from relevant scholarly articles published in reputable international journals and related reports.

A comprehensive overview of the challenges and opportunities in implementing Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), as well as its impact on business sustainability, will be provided by this research through a literature review approach and qualitative analysis. The research results will provide practical insights for SMEs in utilizing GHRM to improve the competitiveness and sustainability of their companies, as the data analysis techniques used will ensure that the research results can do so.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

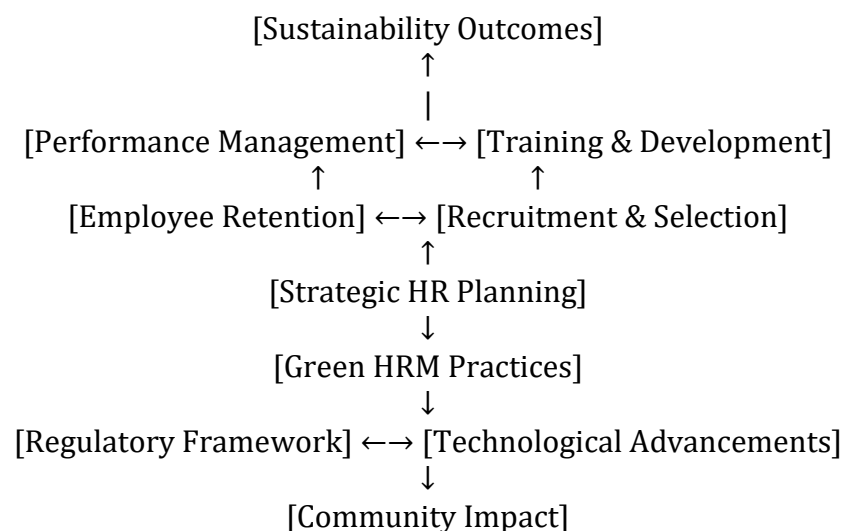
The implementation of Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) presents both challenges and opportunities that significantly influence business sustainability. GHRM practices, which encompass green recruitment, training, performance appraisal, and compensation, are essential for fostering an environmentally conscious workforce. The effectiveness of these practices is contingent upon the commitment of top management and the integration of sustainability into the organizational culture, which can enhance overall business performance and environmental outcomes. One of the primary challenges SMEs face in implementing GHRM is the limited resources available for training and development. Many SMEs struggle to allocate sufficient funds for comprehensive green training programs, which are crucial for equipping employees with the necessary skills and knowledge to engage in sustainable practices (Baeshen et al., 2021; Arsawan, 2024). However, the commitment of management to GHRM can mitigate these challenges. Research indicates that when top management is motivated to pursue green initiatives, the adoption of GHRM practices becomes more feasible, leading to improved environmental performance (Baeshen et al., 2021; Al-shammari et al., 2022). This managerial commitment is vital as it sets the tone for the entire organization,

encouraging employees to adopt environmentally friendly behaviors (Hendarjanti, 2022; Aboramadan & Karatepe, 2021).

Moreover, the integration of GHRM practices can create significant opportunities for SMEs. By fostering a culture of sustainability, organizations can enhance employee engagement and retention, which are critical for long-term success (Vochin et al., 2023; Gyensare, 2023). Studies have shown that GHRM practices positively influence employee well-being and promote green behaviors, which in turn contribute to improved organizational performance (Gyensare, 2023; Ercantan & Eyupoglu, 2022). For instance, the implementation of green training and performance management systems can lead to increased employee creativity and innovation, essential for developing sustainable business practices (Zahrani, 2022; Faizan, 2023). Furthermore, GHRM has been linked to enhanced green innovation, which is crucial for SMEs aiming to differentiate themselves in competitive markets (Al-shammari et al., 2022; Malik et al., 2020).

The relationship between GHRM and sustainable business performance is further supported by empirical evidence. Research has demonstrated that GHRM practices significantly impact the sustainable performance of SMEs, with green innovation acting as a mediator in this relationship (Al-shammari et al., 2022; Wen et al., 2021). This suggests that by adopting GHRM practices, SMEs can not only improve their environmental performance but also achieve competitive advantages in their respective industries (Nawang Sari & Sutawidjaya, 2021; Wulandari & Nawang Sari, 2021). Additionally, as SMEs increasingly recognize the importance of corporate social responsibility (CSR), GHRM can serve as a strategic tool to align their operational practices with broader sustainability goals (Wen et al., 2021; "A Bibliometric and Meta Analysis on Green Human Resource Management for Sustainable Practices", 2024).

While the implementation of GHRM in SMEs is fraught with challenges, particularly related to resource constraints and management commitment, it also presents substantial opportunities for enhancing business sustainability. By effectively integrating GHRM practices, SMEs can foster a culture of environmental responsibility, drive innovation, and ultimately achieve better sustainable performance. The interplay between GHRM, employee engagement, and green innovation underscores the critical role of human resources in navigating the path toward sustainability.



**Figure 1. Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) and Business Sustainability**

Source: Data Processed (2024)

### Core Elements of the Diagram:

1. Central Hub:
  - Green HRM (GHRM) in the center. This is the core practice that connects to all other elements.
  - Green HRM is the central element that connects the entire framework. The surrounding practices (Strategic HR Planning, Recruitment, etc.) highlight how Green HRM is implemented in various HR functions.
2. Branches Extending from GHRM:
  - Strategic HR Planning: Aligning HR practices with sustainability goals (e.g., incorporating green values into the company's mission and HR policies).
  - Recruitment and Selection: Hiring employees with environmental awareness or those who support sustainability initiatives.
  - Training and Development: Providing training on environmental sustainability, eco-friendly practices, and the role of employees in reducing the environmental footprint.
  - Employee Retention: Developing green employee retention programs, including sustainability incentives, career development focused on green practices, and long-term employee engagement in eco-initiatives.
  - Performance Management: Assessing and rewarding employees based on their contribution to sustainability (e.g., eco-friendly behaviors, energy-saving initiatives, waste reduction).
3. Supporting External Factors:
  - Regulatory Framework: Environmental regulations and laws that influence how GHRM practices are shaped (e.g., waste reduction policies, carbon footprint regulations).
  - Community and Social Impact: How GHRM practices align with corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives and the broader community's environmental goals.
  - Technological Advancements: The role of technology in supporting green HR practices, such as the use of energy-efficient tools or remote work policies to reduce commuting.
  - The Supporting External Factors like Regulatory Framework and Technological Advancements indicate that GHRM is influenced by both external pressures (like environmental laws) and internal tools (like technology).
4. Outcome Section:
  - Sustainability Outcomes: Benefits for the business such as reduced costs (e.g., energy savings), enhanced employee satisfaction, improved brand reputation, and increased competitive advantage in the market.
  - The Sustainability Outcomes are the positive results expected from GHRM, including cost savings, employee satisfaction, and improved business performance.

### **Challenges Faced by SMEs in Implementing GHRM**

The implementation of Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) presents a dual landscape of challenges and opportunities that can significantly enhance business sustainability. GHRM practices aim to integrate environmental management into HR functions, thereby fostering a workforce that is not only aware of but actively engaged in sustainable practices.

However, SMEs often encounter specific hurdles that can impede the effective adoption of these practices.

One of the primary challenges faced by SMEs in implementing GHRM is the limited availability of resources. SMEs typically operate with constrained budgets and personnel, which can restrict their ability to invest in comprehensive training programs and green initiatives (Astuti & Wahyuni, 2018; Yudawisastra et al., 2023). This resource limitation often leads to a focus on immediate financial performance over long-term sustainability goals, as many SMEs prioritize production and profit targets without adequately considering their environmental impact (Astuti & Wahyuni, 2018). Additionally, the lack of awareness and understanding of GHRM among SME owners and managers can hinder the integration of green practices into their business models (Faisal & Naushad, 2020; Subramanian & Suresh, 2022). Many SMEs may underestimate their environmental footprint, believing their operations have a negligible impact, which can lead to complacency regarding sustainable practices (Subramanian & Suresh, 2022).

### **Limited Financial and Human Resources**

SMEs often operate with limited budgets and manpower. Allocating resources for environmental initiatives, such as implementing green HR policies or sustainable practices, can be seen as a financial burden. This can include costs associated with training, updating recruitment processes, or investing in green technologies. Many SMEs prioritize short-term cost reductions over long-term sustainability investments, which can hinder the implementation of GHRM.

### **Lack of Awareness and Knowledge**

Many SMEs have limited knowledge of Green HRM and how it can benefit their business. Without a deep understanding of how sustainable HR practices could enhance productivity or improve their corporate image, owners and managers may be reluctant to invest in green initiatives. The lack of a formal sustainability strategy often results in fragmented efforts with little integration into core HR functions.

### **Resistance to Change**

Organizational culture in SMEs may not be ready to embrace sustainability initiatives. Employees and managers might resist changing traditional HR practices, especially if they perceive green initiatives as an additional burden rather than a valuable strategy. This resistance can stem from a lack of training, skepticism about the benefits, or a belief that green HR practices are only relevant to larger companies.

### **Insufficient Infrastructure and Support**

Many SMEs may not have the infrastructure needed to support green HR practices, such as facilities for recycling, energy-efficient office equipment, or systems for monitoring and reducing environmental impact. The lack of technological tools to support sustainability efforts, such as software for tracking energy use or carbon emissions, may make it more difficult for SMEs to adopt GHRM fully.

### **Regulatory and Compliance Challenges**

While environmental regulations are becoming more stringent globally, SMEs may find it challenging to keep up with the changing legal requirements and compliance standards. SMEs often lack the dedicated sustainability teams or legal resources required to ensure full compliance with environmental laws. As a result, they may not be motivated to implement GHRM if they perceive the regulatory burden to be too complex or costly.

## **Opportunities for SMEs in Implementing GHRM**

Despite these challenges, the implementation of GHRM offers significant opportunities for SMEs. By adopting green practices, SMEs can enhance their competitive advantage and improve their overall sustainability performance. Research indicates that GHRM can lead to increased employee engagement and motivation, as employees are more likely to be committed to organizations that prioritize environmental sustainability (Faisal & Naushad, 2020; Chaudhary, 2019). Furthermore, implementing GHRM practices can foster innovation within SMEs, as a focus on sustainability often encourages creative problem-solving and the development of environmentally friendly products and services (Yudawisastra et al., 2023; Ullah et al., 2022). For instance, SMEs that invest in green training and development can cultivate a workforce equipped with the skills necessary to drive sustainable initiatives, ultimately leading to improved operational efficiency and reduced waste (Sugandini et al., 2020; Al-shammari et al., 2022).

### **Cost Reduction Through Efficiency**

One of the significant opportunities for SMEs in implementing GHRM is the potential for cost savings. By adopting green HR practices, SMEs can improve operational efficiency, reduce waste, and lower energy consumption. For example, encouraging employees to adopt energy-saving practices or to reduce paper usage can result in lower utility bills and operational costs over time. Additionally, by optimizing resource use and reducing waste, SMEs can achieve greater operational efficiency without large upfront investments.

### **Attracting and Retaining Talent**

In today's workforce, millennials and Generation Z employees are increasingly looking to work for companies with a strong commitment to sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR). Implementing GHRM can help SMEs attract and retain talent that values environmental responsibility, thus improving employee satisfaction and reducing turnover. Green HR practices, such as promoting sustainable commuting options, creating a green work environment, or offering green benefits, can enhance an SME's employer brand.

### **Improved Brand Image and Market Differentiation**

Adopting green HR practices can enhance an SME's brand image and reputation. In markets where consumers are increasingly conscious of environmental issues, SMEs can differentiate themselves by showcasing their commitment to sustainability. SMEs that implement GHRM can highlight their green initiatives in their marketing strategies, which can attract environmentally conscious consumers and create a competitive advantage.

### **Compliance and Risk Mitigation**

By proactively adopting green HR practices and sustainability strategies, SMEs can ensure they comply with environmental regulations and avoid potential fines or legal liabilities. Additionally, as governments and international organizations are increasingly focusing on sustainability, early adoption of green HR practices can position SMEs as leaders in responsible business practices, mitigating future compliance risks.

### **Innovation and Competitive Advantage**

SMEs that embrace GHRM may foster a culture of innovation by encouraging employees to contribute ideas for sustainable practices and solutions. This can result in new business processes, product innovations, or alternative ways to operate that give the company a competitive edge in the market. For example, SMEs could develop new,

more sustainable products or services, improving market positioning while adhering to environmental standards.

Moreover, the alignment of GHRM with corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives can further enhance the sustainability of SMEs. By integrating GHRM practices with CSR, SMEs can create a holistic approach to sustainability that resonates with stakeholders and customers alike (Yusliza et al., 2019; Aldoghan et al., 2022). This alignment not only improves the organization's reputation but also attracts environmentally conscious consumers, thereby potentially increasing market share and profitability (Panjan et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2019). Additionally, the establishment of a green organizational culture can enhance employee retention and satisfaction, as workers are increasingly seeking employers that demonstrate a commitment to sustainability (Chaudhary, 2019; Cahyadi et al., 2022).

## **How GHRM Contributes to Improving Sustainability in SMEs**

### **Environmental Sustainability**

GHRM plays a crucial role in reducing the carbon footprint of SMEs. By implementing green recruitment practices, such as hiring individuals with expertise in sustainability, and encouraging employees to adopt sustainable behaviors, SMEs can significantly reduce their environmental impact. Practices like promoting remote working (reducing commuting) or paperless communication (reducing waste) can lower overall emissions, waste, and resource consumption.

### **Economic Sustainability**

The adoption of GHRM can also contribute to the economic sustainability of SMEs. By improving operational efficiency and cutting unnecessary costs (e.g., energy, materials), SMEs can increase profitability in the long term. Sustainability-driven innovation can also create new revenue streams by offering eco-friendly products or services, thus expanding market opportunities. Moreover, SMEs that adopt GHRM are more likely to secure funding or investment from sources that prioritize environmental and social governance (ESG) factors.

### **Social Sustainability**

GHRM encourages a culture of environmental consciousness among employees, which can extend to their personal lives and communities. When employees are engaged in sustainability initiatives at work, they often bring these behaviors home, leading to broader societal benefits. Additionally, the implementation of green HR practices contributes to employee well-being, job satisfaction, and a positive organizational culture, which enhances social sustainability within the company.

### **Long-Term Strategic Benefits**

By embedding sustainability into their HR practices, SMEs can build a long-term competitive advantage that ensures their survival and growth. GHRM supports the development of sustainable HR policies that are aligned with the company's mission and values, ensuring that sustainability becomes a core part of the business strategy. This not only helps SMEs stay ahead of regulatory trends but also ensures their resilience against environmental and economic shocks.

## **CONCLUSION**

The implementation of Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) entails both challenges and opportunities in pursuit of enhancing business sustainability. GHRM encompasses HR policies and practices that promote environmental sustainability, chiefly through the mitigation of environmental

impacts through eco-friendly employee management. The obstacles confronting SMEs in implementing GHRM include constrained resources, a deficiency in recognizing the significance of environmental sustainability, and challenges in assimilating green policies into the organizational culture. Training employees or adopting green technologies can incur significant costs, which can act as obstacles to implementation. However, the article identifies opportunities that can be capitalized on, such as improved corporate image, attraction of prospective employees who care about the environment, and operational efficiencies that can be achieved through more efficient and environmentally friendly resource management. GHRM can also improve employee satisfaction and motivation by giving them a role in the company's green initiatives. Despite the challenges, the implementation of GHRM in SMEs can yield long-term benefits for business sustainability and contribute to global goals concerning climate change and environmental protection.

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