

Is Green Human Resource Management the Newest Trend or A Strategic Necessity?

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Abstract: A growing interest has been noted in the concept of business management that consciously focuses not only on financial profits and economic matters but also on broadly defined social and ecological issues within our rapidly evolving market economy. The principles of environmental corporate responsibility are increasingly shaping the decision-making processes of entrepreneurs due to the rising necessity of this approach, referred to as sustainable development. The author of the study asserts that the human element must be integrated to implement the aforementioned business strategy. Eco-oriented management can only be effectively executed by employees who maintain a positive perspective on the environment, possess green competencies, and are accountable for the environmental impacts of their actions. Consequently, green human resource management—commonly known as HRM—plays a crucial role in enhancing environmental performance by fostering the adoption of ecological development principles and nurturing employees' environmentally friendly attitudes. The innovative approach to executing the HR function within organizations is termed "green human resource management," where environmental considerations form the foundation of all activities. This involves the establishment of HR policies aimed at promoting the sustainable utilization of business resources, safeguarding the environment, and enhancing employees' ecological awareness. This is due to the fact that the ecological consciousness of both managers and employees is vital for any business to function in alignment with the sustainability concept. The objective of the study is to illustrate the relevance of Green HRM to contemporary business practices and to propose actionable strategies that can be implemented in the field to enhance understanding of the subject and expand the application of the concept as a means of fostering sustainable enterprises. The theoretical segment of the study, which is based on a review of global literature, identifies various environmental practices applicable in the realm of human resource management at every step of the hiring process, from the creation of "green" competencies and "green" working conditions to work design, employee selection, and work discipline shaping.

I. Introduction

The ongoing decline of the natural environment due to human exploitation has made it essential to adopt the concept of sustainable development. This framework not only introduces a new level of management (Skowroński 2006) but also requires the identification of new sources of competitive advantage to meet corporate economic goals while taking into account broadly defined social and environmental concerns (Hart, Milstein 2003; Abidin, Pasquire 2007; Joonhyun, Jinsoo 2018; Jabłoński 2018). Although this concept has been studied for more than a decade at both macroeconomic and microeconomic levels, it is only recently that the links between sustainable development and human resources within organizations have been acknowledged. Nonetheless, it is the human factor that propels initiatives aimed at improving organizations' environmental performance. Eco-oriented management is executed exclusively by individuals who exhibit a positive attitude towards the environment, possess ecological knowledge, and feel a sense of accountability for the environmental impacts of their actions (Bombiak, Marciniuk-Kluska 2018; Smaliukienė, Monn 2019). It is crucial to emphasize that Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) is vital in promoting environmentally-friendly practices within organizations. Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) represents a facet of Sustainable Human Resource Management (Stankevičiūtė, Savanevičienė 2018; Beck-Krala, Klimkiewicz 2017) that focuses on creating value for stakeholders by simultaneously addressing efficiency, social, and environmental considerations within HR processes. HR processes are pivotal not only for the effective execution of sustainable development policies (Renwick et al. 2008; Ulrich, Brockbank, Johnson 2009) but also for fostering a culture of sustainable development (Liebowitz 2010; Harmon, Fairfield, Wirtenberg 2010). Consequently, the approach to human resource management is essential for achieving environmental objectives.

Despite the significance of this field, Green HRM is still largely unknown to managers, indicating that it remains in the early stages of its development. The current body of literature reveals a scarcity of studies concentrating on the practical implementation of this concept. The author intends to partially fill this void. The objective of this research is to clarify the fundamental nature of the concept and assess the impact that pro-environmental human resource practices may have on the sustainable development of organizations. Throughout the study, efforts were made to substantiate the hypothesis that GHRM practices influence the sustainable development of organizations, thus providing strategic assistance for the adoption of the concept. The research was conducted through a review of existing literature and a diagnostic survey method that involved a questionnaire survey.

Environmental Responsibility as a Factor for Corporate Competitiveness: theoretical aspects

Competitiveness is a characteristic that highlights the exceptional capabilities of a specific enterprise to engage in activities that ensure its stable and long-lasting development, thereby enhancing its market value (Walczak 2010). In modern economies, it is regarded as the synergistic effects of various internal factors (including human resources, production time and costs, technology,

pricing, and distribution networks), along with external mechanisms and conditions (such as consumer preferences) (Gorynia 2000; Krawczyk 2012). Today, there is an increasing social awareness regarding the significance of green competitiveness – understood as the capacity to compete and leverage environmental initiatives (Adamkiewicz-Drwiłło, Kruk, Skrzyszewska 2008).

The significance of environmentally-friendly practices arises from the growing popularity of the sustainable development concept, which is increasingly viewed as a new business opportunity and a means to gain a competitive advantage (Holliday 2001). According to its principles, to achieve success, organizations must concentrate not only on economic factors but also on social and environmental aspects (Daily, Bishop, Steiner 2007). The symbiosis between enterprise, society, and the environment is essential (Olejniczak 2013), leading entrepreneurs to be more influenced by Environmental Corporate Social Responsibility (ECSR). The core of ECSR is to enhance the value of an enterprise through (Chodyński, Jabłoński, Jabłoński 2008):

- the development of an effective business model grounded in environmental criteria;
- the creation of environmental innovations associated with sustainable corporate growth;
- the allocation of tangible and intangible assets in line with established environmental standards;
- environmental standard reporting.

The ECSR framework primarily represents a concept in which companies voluntarily incorporate environmental considerations into their business practices and interactions with stakeholders. Research shows a beneficial effect of environmental practices on the reduction of operating costs. Opportunities for growth translate into enhanced financial performance (Olkiewicz 2016; Beurden, Gössling 2008; Matejun 2009; Lin et al. 2010) and competitive advantages (Wagner 2007). Environmental corporate responsibility can foster the establishment of new business ventures and improve relationships with stakeholders. Another outcome of ECSR is environmental innovation, which not only leads to the development of new products and processes that provide added value to both companies and customers but also enhances the efficiency of natural resource utilization in the economy and mitigates the adverse effects of human activities on the environment (Seroka-Stolka 2012; Ottman 2011; OECD 2011; Kemp, Pearson 2008). Furthermore, environmental corporate engagement aids in gaining local community acceptance and attracting investor interest, thus improving access to funding. It is evident that investors prefer to collaborate with companies that take pride not only in their financial results but also in operational transparency, the ethical development of corporate image, and positive relationships with external parties (Ślupik 2014; Mishra, Suar 2010; Lai et al. 2010). Lastly, the significance of other non-financial impacts, such as enhanced security, improved working conditions, and increased employee motivation to participate in environmentally-friendly initiatives, is also emphasized.

In light of the above, it can be concluded that currently, environmental corporate responsibility is not only advantageous but also, more importantly, essential. However, the successful implementation of such a business model is primarily influenced by human factors. Sustainable corporate development grounded in green practices is feasible only if the workforce possesses the necessary competencies related to the practical application of these principles, provided that such competencies are consistently nurtured and effectively utilized. Consequently, the following thesis can be proposed: the role of human resource management focused on facilitating the application of green principles is crucial.

II. The Essence of Green Human Resource Management: literature review

Human resource management refers to a comprehensive set of actions aimed at ensuring the availability of a sufficient number of employees who possess the necessary skills and competencies, while also fostering conditions that encourage effective staff behavior at a designated time and location (Pocztowski 1993). The fundamental principle of this concept is a subjective perspective on human resources, viewed as an integral part of a company's assets and a vital source of competitive advantage.

Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) represents a progressive approach to executing the HR function within an organization, where the environmental context serves as the foundation for all initiatives undertaken (Pabian 2015). This entails the implementation of HR policies that advocate for the sustainable utilization of corporate resources and ecological considerations (Mampra 2013; Zoogah 2011). GHRM is an essential instrument for advancing sustainable development (Urbaniak 2017; Gholam et al. 2016; Bangwal & Tiwari 2015; Renwick et al. 2013). An increasing number of studies focused on GHRM, as evidenced by the analysis of international databases (Figure 1), clearly indicates that awareness of this issue is growing. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that this topic is relatively recent, having been studied for less than two decades, which suggests that it is still in its early stages of development. The green initiative implemented as part of GHRM is an integral component of broader corporate social responsibility programs (Mandip 2012). Its main aim is to foster ecological awareness among employees and to educate them on how their individual actions can impact the environment. This initiative focuses on motivation and instilling a sense of pride in participating in green initiatives. Consequently, Green HRM facilitates the development of a green workforce that comprehends, values, and engages in ecological initiatives (Ahmad 2015; Opatha, Arulrajah 2014). Research findings indicate that green programs are significantly positively correlated with environmental performance (AnuSingh, Shikha 2015). Green Human Resource Management is increasingly becoming a pivotal business strategy for major organizations, where human resource departments actively contribute to the organizations' sustainability efforts (Kar, Praharaj 2017). It has broadened the scope of traditional HRM practices towards more sustainable and environmentally friendly strategies (Peerzadah, Mufti, Nazir 2018).

Scholars addressing GHRM topics highlight various environmental practices relevant to human resource management at every stage of the HR process. A selection of these practices is detailed in figure 2 below.

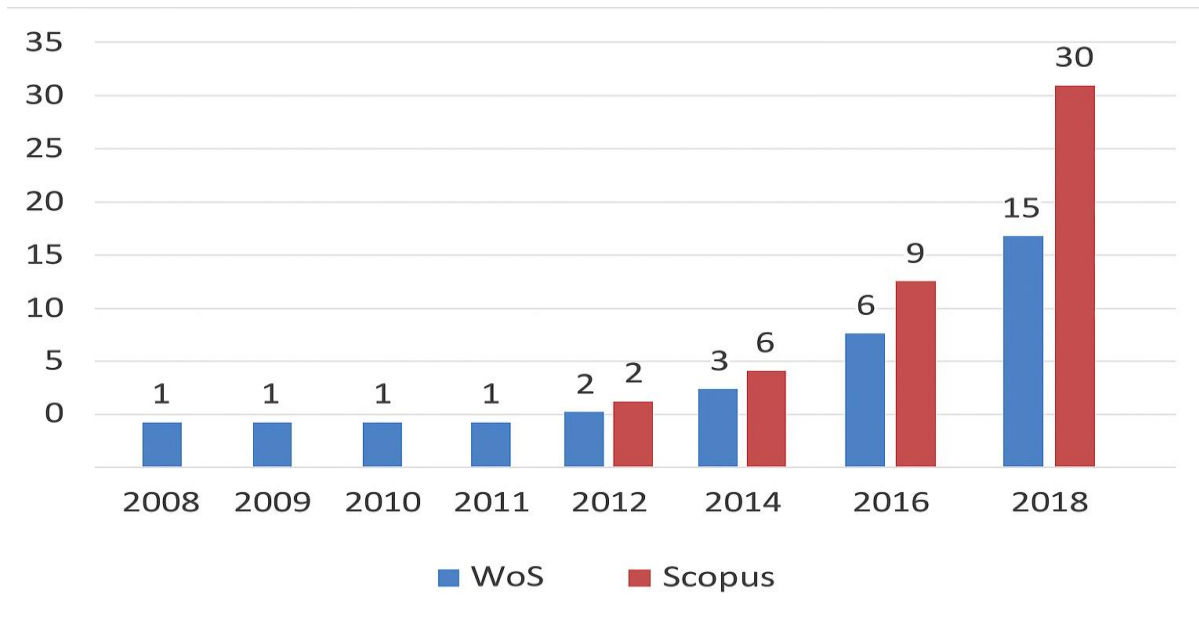


Figure 1. The number of publications containing the term “Green Human Resource Management” in selected databases. *Source:* own research

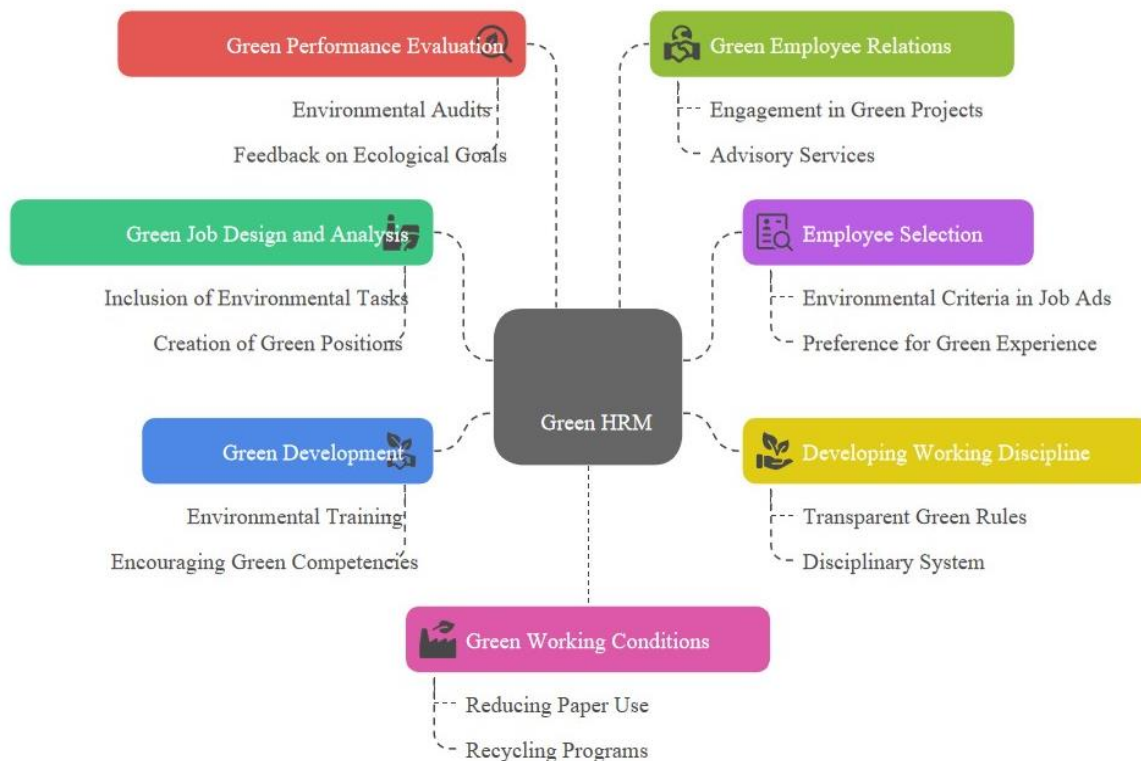


Figure 2. Green HRM practices and their impacts

The analysis of environmental HR practices shown in Table 2 allows one to conclude that GHRM covers various initiatives which popularize environmental thinking amongst employees (Mishra, Sarkar, Kiranmai 2014) and encourage environmentally-friendly attitudes. It is underpinned in source literature that GHRM has long ago ceased to be a non-mandatory addition and instead became a necessity (Ackermann 2017; Müller–Camen, Zdravkovic 2012). Thus, it is vital to identify those GHRM practices, which support corporate sustainable development to the largest extent.

III. Research methodology

The aim of the study is to evaluate the influence that pro-environmental human resource practices may exert on the sustainable development of organizations. The research was carried out through a review of existing literature and a diagnostic survey method that included a questionnaire. Throughout the analysis, the following research questions were explored:

- Are Polish managers aware of the Green Human Resource Management concept?
- Which Green Human Resource Management practices are essential for the sustainable development of organizations within the Polish context?
- Which Green Human Resource Management practices are most frequently implemented in Polish organizations?

During the research, efforts were made to test the hypothesis that GHRM practices influence the sustainable development of organizations, thereby potentially offering strategic support for the implementation of the concept. The focus of the research was on environmentally friendly human resource practices adopted by Polish enterprises. The diagnosis was based on seven areas of human resource policy:

- Green job design and analysis;
- Green recruitment;
- Development of green discipline in the workplace;
- Green development;
- Green performance evaluation;
- Green motivation;
- Green HRM procedures.

The research sought to assess the impact of individual practices on the sustainable development of the enterprises examined. The evaluation of this impact was performed using a five-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated a very low impact and 5 indicated a very high impact of a specific practice. To assess the extent of GHRM concept implementation in the Polish context, the prevalence of various environmental human resource practices was analysed.

The survey was conducted in 2018 among a randomly selected representative sample of 300 medium and large enterprises based in Poland. The study utilized the CATI technique, and the sample was chosen on a stratified basis. Initially, 50 entities from each of the six Polish regions were selected. : Central, South, East, North-West, South-West and North. The survey targeted individuals in charge of human resource policy development in the enterprises studied. The characteristic features of the study population are shown in figure 3.

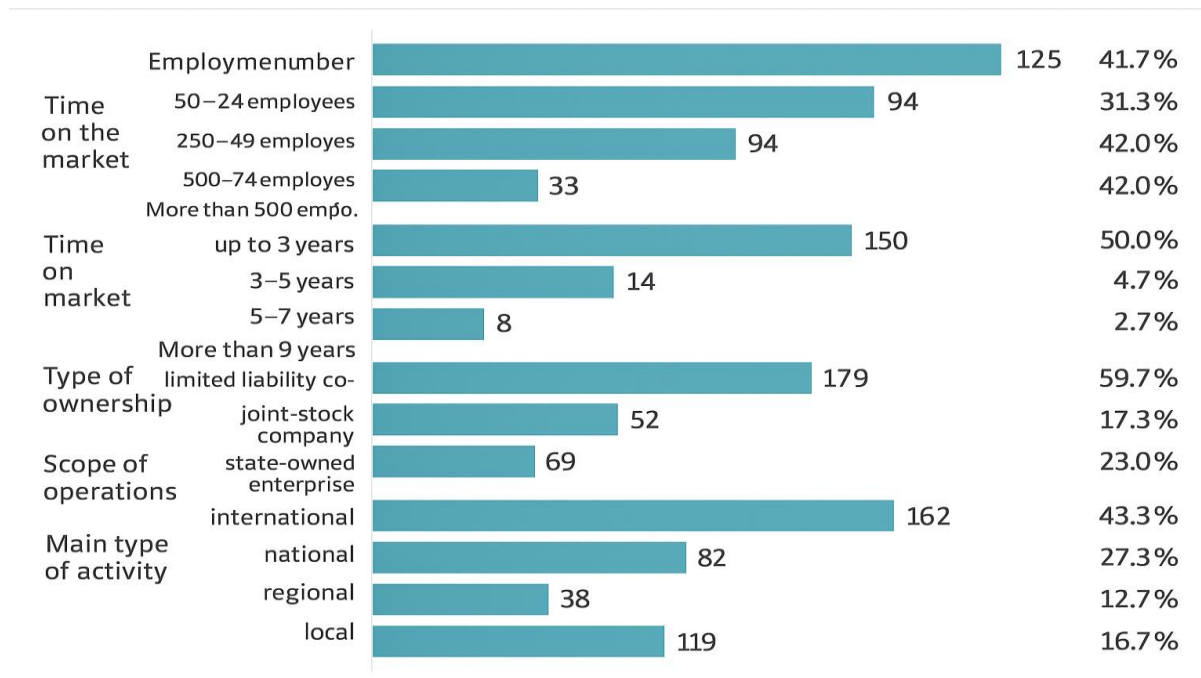


Figure 3. Details of enterprises generated by the researchers

The predominant form of ownership among young organizations was the limited liability company, accounting for 59.7%. The geographical distribution of these enterprises was notably diverse, with a significant portion operating on a global scale (43.3%). The most common type of business activity among the entities studied was service provision, representing 54%. The majority of the enterprises in the examined population were medium-sized, defined as those employing between 50 and 249 individuals (41.7%), and had been in operation for up to 3 years (50.0%). A detailed analysis of the research findings concerning young enterprises is discussed in a separate publication (Bombiak, Marciniuk-Kluska 2018).

The Effect of GHRM on Corporate Sustainable Development in the Light of Empirical Research

The focus of the research was on environmental practices adopted within the realm of GHRM, which were further categorized into seven distinct areas of HR policy. This study aimed to assess the influence that each individual practice exerts on the sustainable development of the enterprises under examination. The evaluation of this impact was carried out using a five-point Likert scale, where a score of 1 indicated a very low impact and a score of 5 represented a very high impact of the respective practice. The findings of the analysis are detailed in Table 3.

Table 3. The impact of GHRM practices on the sustainable development of organizations (scale of 1 to 5)

Area of GHRM	Activities	Mean impact assessment of an activity	Mean impact assessment of an area
Green job design and analysis	1. Inclusion of tasks related to environmental protection in job descriptions	2.9	2.7
	2. Inclusion of green competencies (such as ecological knowledge) as a part of competency requirements for each position	2.5	
	3. Creation of positions accountable for environmental corporate management	2.8	
Green recruitment	4. Communication of employer's commitment to ecology during recruitment	2.3	2.3
	5. Exposure of environmental values in job vacancy advertising	2.2	
	6. Verification of candidate's ecological knowledge and skills during recruitment process	2.2	
	7. Giving preference to candidates with competencies and experience in environmental projects	2.2	
	8. Introducing new employees to environmental standards of organization during adaptation	2.5	
The shaping of green discipline at work	9. Establishment of a clear set of rules and provisions regarding employee conduct in relation to environmental protection	2.7	2.5
	10. Development of a disciplinary system to discipline employees breaching the principles of ecological conduct	2.4	
	11. Implementation of disciplinary actions (such as warning, penalty, suspension, dismissal) against employees breaching the provisions and rules of environmental protection	2.4	
Green development	12. Analysis and identification of employee needs with regards to ecological training	2.4	2.4
	13. Provisions of ecological training for employees and managers to develop ecological skills and knowledge	2.4	
	14. Incentives for workers to develop green competencies	2.3	
Green performance evaluation	15. Inclusion of environmental criteria in performance appraisals	2.2	
	16. Establishment of goals and responsibilities in relation to ecological	2.4	

	initiative implementation		2.4
	17. Conduct of environmental audits	2.6	
	18. Provision of regular feedback to employees on their progress in attaining ecological goals or improvement of their environmental effectiveness	2.4	
Green motivation	19. encouraging employees to submit ecological initiatives (e.g. ecological	2.4	

The data analysis presented in Table 3 substantiates the assertion that pro-environmental initiatives implemented within the realm of human resource management influence, albeit with variations, the sustainable development of the organizations under study. The evaluation of the impact of specific activities varied between 2.3 and 3.5. According to the respondents, the activity deemed to have the most significant impact was activity no. 23, which involves promoting environmentally-friendly behaviors in the execution of professional tasks (such as reducing paper usage and sorting waste). The respondents rated the impact of this activity at 3.5 on a 5-point scale. Other activities considered essential by the respondents included:

- ☐ Incorporating tasks related to environmental protection (duties and responsibilities) into job descriptions (activity no. 1), with an average impact of 2.9;
- ☐ Establishing positions dedicated to managing environmental aspects within organizations (activity no. 3), with an average impact of 2.8;
- ☐ Formulating a clear set of guidelines and regulations concerning employee behavior regarding environmental protection (activity 9), with an average impact of 2.7;
- ☐ Integrating environmental objectives of HRM into the company strategy (activity 24) and conducting environmental audits (activity 17), both with an average impact of 2.6.

Conversely, respondents associated a minimal impact on sustainable development within organizations with the following activities:

- ☐ Highlighting environmental values in job vacancy advertisements (activity 5);
- ☐ Assessing candidates' ecological knowledge and skills during the recruitment process (activity 6);
- ☐ Prioritizing candidates with competencies and experience in environmental projects (activity 7);
- ☐ Incorporating environmental criteria into performance evaluations (activity 15).

The impact of these activities was rated at 2.2 on the 5-point scale employed. Comparable findings were observed when analyzing pro-ecological practices among young enterprises (Bombiak, Marcini).

The examination of the influence of specific GHRM domains reveals that respondents view them as having a moderate effect on the sustainable development of organizations. The mean average, calculated as the arithmetic mean of the evaluations of each domain, was 2.5 points on the applied 5-point scale. The significance of each domain varied according to the respondents' perspectives. The domain identified as having the most substantial impact was the work analysis and design phase, with an average impact score of 2.7 points, derived from the arithmetic mean of the evaluations of individual practices divided by their quantity within that domain. Furthermore, a relatively high impact was attributed to the area of motivating employees to engage in environmentally-friendly actions, which received a score of 2.6 points. These domains were considered essential from the standpoint of the HR function's contribution to the sustainable development of organizations. The effectiveness of Green motivation was further corroborated by research conducted in Denmark, which indicated that green motivation programs enhanced employee involvement in pro-environmental initiatives (Forman, Joergensen 2001). Additionally, a study involving 376 Pakistani companies highlighted the crucial role of educational practices in achieving environmental management objectives (Bhutto, Auranzeb 2016). It is important to note that Green development practices seem to be undervalued in Poland, as they were ranked fourth regarding their influence on the sustainable development of organizations.

Relatively low evaluations were also assigned to the significance of recruiting job candidates with green competencies, with recruitment being rated the lowest, achieving an average impact score of only 2.3 points. The minimal impact of green employee acquisition was also evidenced by studies conducted by Owino and Kwasira (Owino, Kwasira 2016) and Guerici et al. (Guerici et al. 2016). The latter study indicated that green recruitment was perceived as an activity with negligible impact on environmental performance.

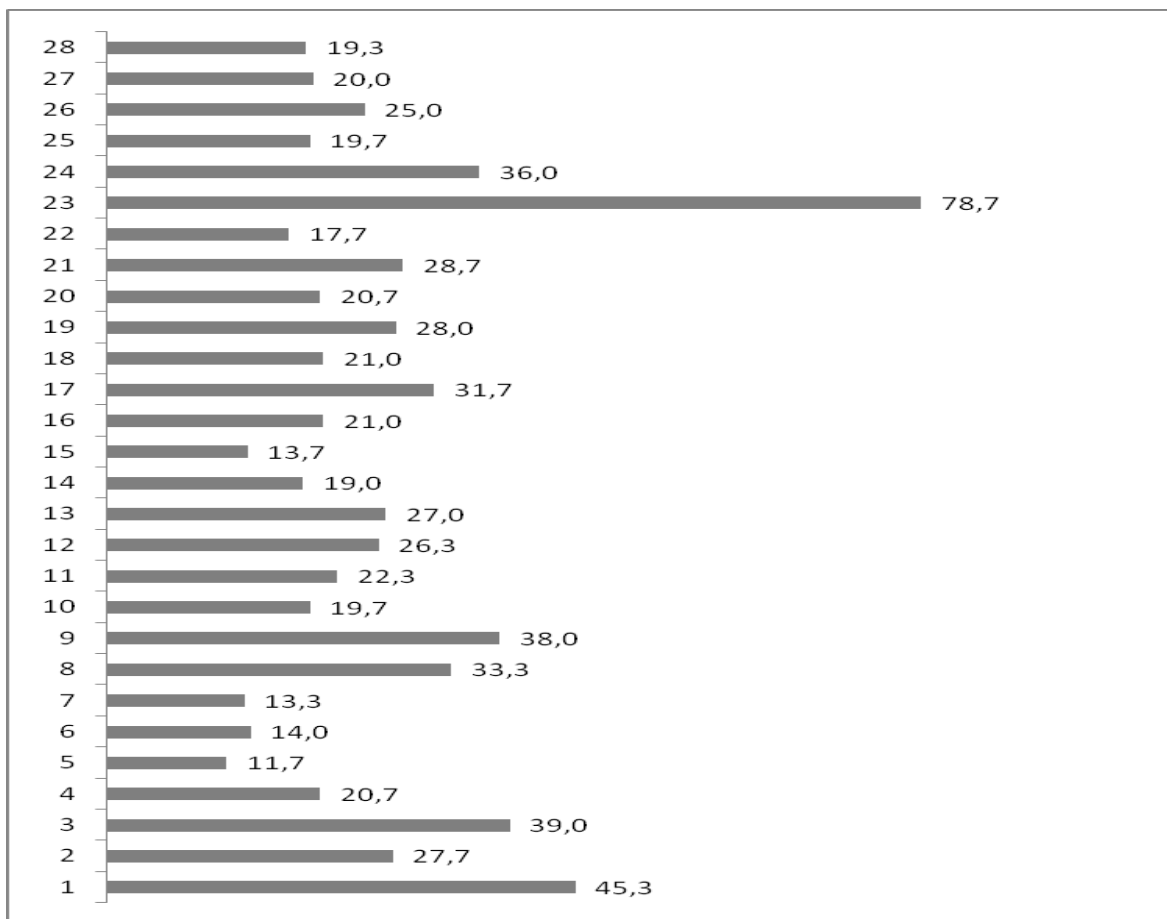
Against this background, the scope of implementation of individual GHRM practices becomes a crucial research issue.

The Elements of GHRM in the Practice of the Study Enterprises

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Note: the y-axis shows the numbers of activities included in Table 3

Figure 2. The scope of implementation of GHRM practices in Polish enterprises (data shown in %) *Source:* own research

The findings illustrated in Figure 2 indicate that the concept of GHRM is relatively unpopular among Polish organizations. Polish managers seem to be significantly trailing behind their American counterparts regarding the application of the GHRM concept, as the latter frequently utilize environmental goal-oriented bonuses for management purposes (Wehrmeyer 1997). Research conducted in Poland has revealed that ecological practices are primarily adopted to enhance the company's image or to achieve financial gains (Beck-Krala, Klimkiewicz 2017). The cultivation of environmentally-friendly attitudes among staff is largely regarded as a secondary benefit. Nevertheless, the adoption of GHRM is crucial, as the pro-ecological attitudes fostered within companies can indeed be transferred to individuals' private lives (Whitmarsh, O'Neill 2010; Muster, Schrader 2011; Urbaniak 2017). There is a noticeable absence of a systematic approach within the studied enterprises, resulting in the selection of a few isolated environmental practices within the GHRM domain. This could primarily be attributed to a lack of knowledge in the area (Bombiak, Marciniuk-

Kluska 2018). Such a competency gap was corroborated by the analyses conducted, which revealed that only one in four managers (26% of respondents) had insight into Green HRM. In Poland, environmental corporate social responsibility (ECSR), which encompasses GHRM, remains a relatively obscure initiative. It is neither well-established nor deeply ingrained in Polish enterprises. The principal issue lies in the failure to recognize environmental concerns as components of strategic management. Many entrepreneurs anticipate that these matters should be addressed by politicians and public officials. The primary mechanism for implementing environmental practices in this context is prescriptive legislation (Slupik 2014). However, GHRM practices continue to be voluntary. Another challenge associated with the implementation of GHRM may stem from differing perceptions of the green economy (Urbaniak 2017). While management tends to portray a more idealistic vision of a green company, the staff demonstrate a more cynical approach. These discrepancies may indicate a lack of green organizational culture (Harris, Crane 2002). It is underpinned in source literature that from the point of view of environmental performance of organizations GHRM practice formalization is required (Jabbour 2011).

IV. Conclusions

In addressing the question raised in the study's title, it can be asserted that GHRM is not merely a passing trend but a strategic imperative, particularly in light of the growing social awareness regarding environmental issues and the increasing demands for environmental protection. The adoption of GHRM aids in cultivating a distinctive resource—'green' human capital—characterized by heightened environmental awareness and effectiveness. Consequently, it can be concluded that GHRM serves as a foundation for establishing a sustained competitive advantage for organizations. Environmental protection poses a significant challenge for modern businesses that must navigate the need to balance economic growth with environmentally sustainable practices. Research indicates that Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) plays a crucial role in facilitating the implementation of green strategies. GHRM represents a novel field of study within Human Resource Management (HRM) that focuses on fostering an environmentally conscious organizational culture and promoting positive employee attitudes towards sustainability. Both the literature review and empirical research substantiate the assertion that pro-environmental initiatives within GHRM influence sustainable development. In addressing the question raised in the study's title, it can be asserted that GHRM is not merely a passing trend but a strategic imperative, particularly in light of the growing social awareness regarding environmental issues and the increasing demands for environmental protection. The adoption of GHRM aids in cultivating a distinctive resource—'green' human capital—characterized by heightened environmental awareness and effectiveness. Consequently, it can be concluded that GHRM serves as a foundation for establishing a sustained competitive advantage for organizations.

However, this concept seems to be undervalued and has a limited scope of application within Polish enterprises. This situation highlights that the HR function in Poland is still not viewed as a strategic partner that actively engages in processes that create added value for various stakeholders. Enhancing GHRM competencies is a critical requirement to elevate the role of HRM in developing sustainable organizations, as the lack of managerial knowledge in this area remains a significant barrier to the practical application of the concept. To address this issue, it is essential to promote the essence of GHRM within business communities, conduct comprehensive research on the effects of environmental human resource practices on sustainable development, and showcase exemplary practices in social reports.

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This study contributes to source literature by diagnosing a gap associated with human resource policy use as a tool for supporting corporate sustainable development under Polish conditions, which constitutes the foundation for taking up corrective actions by managers. In the opinion of the author, the results of the cited studies may stimulate interest in the implementation of the GHRM concept in Polish organizations and the widening of the scope of its use as a tool for sustainable enterprise development.

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