

Sustainable People Management Practices in Higher Educational Institutions in India

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Abstract

Promoting sustainable employee practices through the interface of all employees at educational institutions is known as "green human resource practices." The term "green human resource or sustainable people management practices" refers to HR initiatives that are environmentally friendly, support the sustainable use of resources in educational institutions, and increase faculty productivity in higher education. It leads to more efficiency, lower expenses, and improved faculty management. In order to increase the productivity of faculty members in higher education institutions, this article's contribution consists of compiling the body of existing literature in the field, outlining the landscape, and suggesting new practices to make justifiable use of scarce resources besides prevent the environment from getting contaminated, help in coordinating and reducing waste and avoidable carbon.

The purpose of this research work is to quantify the presence of green HRM practices in colleges and the use of these practices by faculty members in higher education institutions across India. Although a comprehensive understanding of the processes and mechanisms by which sustainable people management practices effect college faculty members' behavior is needed, this study offers a basic understanding of the components of Sustainable People Management Practices and current practices prevalent in educational institutions with suggestion to improve the obstacles

while implementing these practices. The study gives us an overview of the fundamentals of GRM procedures and how employees use them in their daily work at institutions.

Keywords: Sustainable People Management, GHRM, Green HRM Practices, Teaching Faculty.

Introduction

Sustainability has emerged as a critical priority in various sectors, and higher educational institutions (HEIs) are no exception. As centers of knowledge creation and dissemination, HEIs play a pivotal role in shaping a sustainable future, not only through their academic endeavors but also through the way they manage their human resources. Sustainable People Management Practices (SPMP) extend beyond traditional HR approaches to incorporate environmental consciousness, social responsibility, and long-term economic viability into the management of faculty, staff, and administrative personnel.

In the Indian context, the adoption of sustainable HRM practices in HEIs is increasingly gaining attention. The country's higher education sector, being one of the largest globally, faces unique challenges, such as resource constraints, regulatory complexities, and diverse stakeholder expectations. These challenges necessitate a rethinking of traditional people management strategies to align with sustainable development goals (SDGs). Integrating sustainability into HR functions like recruitment, training, performance management, and organizational culture is essential for fostering institutions that not only deliver academic excellence but also contribute to broader societal and environmental well-being.

This paper aims to explore the conceptual frameworks and theoretical underpinnings of SPMP in the Indian higher education sector. By synthesizing existing literature and highlighting key principles of sustainability, the study offers a comprehensive perspective on how HEIs can adopt sustainable practices to address contemporary challenges and contribute to long-term institutional success. The discussion also underscores the importance of aligning people management strategies with sustainability imperatives to meet the evolving expectations of students, staff, and society at large.

Conceptual Model: The SPIRIT Framework

To address the need for Sustainable People Management Practices (SPMP) in Indian Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs), this study proposes the **SPIRIT Framework**. The model emphasizes six interconnected components—**Strategy, People, Infrastructure, Research, Innovation, and Training**—that collectively strengthen the integration of sustainability in HEIs. Each dimension contributes uniquely to institutional resilience while maintaining a continuous feedback loop for refinement and improvement.



Strategy: Leadership and Vision

Sustainability in HEIs must begin with a clear strategic direction. Strong leadership and institutional vision can align organizational policies with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education). For instance, NMIMS integrates sustainability through the **KASH framework (Knowledge, Attitude, Skills, and Habits)** to institutionalize values and skills.

People: Inclusive and Equitable Practices

The people dimension emphasizes inclusivity, diversity, and well-being for faculty, staff, and students. Policies that ensure equitable opportunities and prioritize employee wellness are essential for sustainable HR practices. Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) have introduced initiatives to promote diversity and provide mentorship for women and underrepresented groups.

Infrastructure: Greener Campuses

Sustainable infrastructure provides both functional and symbolic value. Eco-friendly campuses not only reduce environmental impact but also serve as models for students and communities. The Indian Institute of Science (IISc) demonstrates this by integrating **solar power, rainwater harvesting, and water recycling systems**.

Research: Knowledge Generation

Research is essential for embedding sustainability into institutional knowledge and practice. HEIs should encourage sustainability-related research, collaborations, and conferences. For example, NMIMS organized **EduSustain 2024**, fostering dialogue and knowledge exchange on green practices.

Innovation: Technology Integration

Technology plays a critical role in advancing sustainability. Through blended learning, digital HR platforms, and AI-driven tools, institutions can reduce resource use while enhancing operational efficiency. Learning Management Systems (LMS), widely adopted in Indian HEIs, demonstrate how digital tools reduce reliance on physical resources while improving training and people management..

Training: Capacity Building

Sustainability requires long-term capacity building among faculty, staff, and administrators. Structured training initiatives enhance leadership capabilities and foster environmentally responsible decision-making. IIMs, for instance, conduct **leadership programs with a focus on ethical and sustainable practices**.

Feedback Loops and Continuous Improvement

The SPIRIT framework operates as a dynamic system with feedback loops to ensure adaptability. Institutions can assess effectiveness through employee satisfaction surveys, diversity indices, and carbon footprint analyses. These metrics enable iterative refinement of policies and practices, ensuring alignment with sustainability goals.

Benefits of the SPIRIT Framework

- Strengthens institutional reputation by aligning with global sustainability goals.
- Creates an inclusive, equitable, and supportive environment for employees.
- Enhances academic and operational excellence through innovation and green practices.
- Positions Indian HEIs as leaders in sustainability education and management.

Review of Literature

The growing concern for environmental sustainability has compelled organizations worldwide to incorporate green practices into their strategic and operational frameworks. The concept of Green Human Resource Management (Green HRM) has thus gained prominence as it integrates environmental management into HR functions such as training, development, employee participation, and organizational culture.

According to Veerasamy, Joseph, and Parayitam (2022), employee involvement in green environmental programs and participation in training and development on environment-friendly business practices (EGB) positively influence the overall effectiveness of sustainable initiatives. Their findings suggest that organizations that invest in employee training and align HR development programs with environmental objectives create a more engaged workforce that actively contributes to ecological performance. Training employees on green competencies not

only enhances awareness but also improves organizational outcomes by embedding sustainability into daily operations.

Earlier, Ahmed (2015) emphasized that rising global awareness of climate change, coupled with regulatory pressures, has compelled organizations to adopt eco-friendly practices. These practices mainly focus on reducing carbon footprints, efficient waste management, and the adoption of green products. His study highlights that environmental strategies are no longer optional but a strategic necessity, as organizations face increasing scrutiny from stakeholders and society. By promoting eco-friendly policies, companies can position themselves as socially responsible, thereby improving reputation and gaining long-term competitive advantages.

Further expanding this view, Malik, Cao, and Mughal (2021) highlighted the role of Green Structural Capital, which refers to the systems, processes, and institutionalized knowledge supporting environmental management. Their study demonstrated that Green Structural Capital positively influences sustainable performance, indicating that organizations with robust environmental policies, technologies, and infrastructures are more likely to achieve long-term ecological and financial success. This research aligns with the resource-based view, suggesting that intangible assets, such as knowledge and culture, play a critical role in shaping sustainable outcomes.

The relationship between intellectual capital and sustainability has also been underscored by Kundi (2022), who argued that intellectual capital provides a foundation for achieving competitive advantage and sustainable performance. By leveraging knowledge-based resources, organizations can foster innovations in green practices, enhance employee creativity, and integrate sustainability across functions. Intellectual capital thus acts as a catalyst for building green capabilities that ensure both ecological and economic benefits.

However, developing a green organizational culture is not without challenges. Hosain (2016) stressed that cultivating and maintaining a culture of Green HRM is a time-consuming and lengthy process. Organizations often encounter resistance to change, lack of awareness, and insufficient resources while transitioning toward sustainability. Nonetheless, once established, a

green culture can significantly strengthen environmental performance by aligning individual and organizational goals.

To address this, Vasa and Sowdamin (2017) proposed the “Green Work-Life Concept”, emphasizing that environmentally friendly behavior should not be restricted to professional domains but extended to personal life as well. Encouraging employees to practice sustainability both at home and in the workplace creates consistency in values, making green behavior a natural aspect of daily living. Such an integrated approach can enhance employee commitment to sustainability and further strengthen organizational initiatives.

Additionally, Rahman (2016) highlighted that organizations need to understand the scope and depth of green HR practices to maximize their benefits. With a clear strategic direction and comprehensive implementation, firms can not only improve organizational performance but also enhance social goodwill. His research suggests that successful implementation of Green HRM creates a positive corporate image, attracting environmentally conscious customers, employees, and investors.

Taken together, the reviewed literature establishes that Green HRM practices—ranging from training and development to intellectual capital and cultural transformation—are crucial for achieving sustainability. While the transition is gradual and resource-intensive, it offers long-term advantages in terms of competitive positioning, social legitimacy, and ecological responsibility. Yet, the literature also indicates the need for deeper exploration into how these practices interact with each other in different organizational and cultural contexts. There is an emerging consensus that a holistic approach to Green HRM—incorporating employee participation, green culture, structural capital, and work-life integration—can create sustainable business models that balance environmental and organizational goals.

As per Udhayageetha Veerasamy, Michael Sammanasu Joseph and Satyanarayana Parayitam, 2022, there is a positive association between employee involvement and participation in green environmental programs and the training and development of employees on EGB. In 2015, Shoab Ahmed, explained that growing awareness has compelled organizations to adopt environment friendly practices focusing mainly on reducing carbon foot print, waste

management and using green products. In 2021, Saqib Yaqoob Malik, Yukum Cao, Yasir Hayat Mughal explored that Green Structural Capital has a positive effect on sustainable performance.

In 2022, Ghulam Mohammad Kundi, explained that Intellectual capital helps to gain competitive advantage and sustainable performance. In 2016, Sajjid Hosain, already stressed upon developing and maintaining a culture of green HRM that is time consuming and lengthy process. In 2017, Dr. Sireesha Rani Vasa, Dr. T Sowdamin suggested the “Green Work Life Concept “ to facilitate environmentally friendly behavior in both life domains working as well as private life. In 2016, Sadiqur Rahman, suggested that With proper understanding and implementation of scope and depth of green HR practices, a firm can improve its social and organizational performance in a sustainable manner to earn goodwill.

Research Gap

While sustainability is increasingly emphasized in Indian Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs), its integration into people management practices remains limited. Existing HR practices often overlook environmental responsibility, employee well-being, and social sustainability. Most studies focus on curricula, research, or infrastructure, leaving HRM as an underexplored dimension. This lack of a comprehensive framework for Sustainable People Management Practices (SPMP) contributes to challenges like faculty attrition, inefficiencies, and weak alignment with global sustainability goals. Hence, there is a critical gap in both theory and practice regarding how SPMP can be effectively adopted in Indian HEIs.

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the key components of Sustainable People Management Practices that contributes to sustainability in Indian HEIs.
2. To examine the current practices in Indian HEIs by assessing the extent to which Indian higher educational institutions have implemented sustainable HR practices.
3. To explore the challenges in implementing the SPMP in the Educational Institutions.
4. To develop a conceptual model for adopting SPMP tailored to the unique needs of Indian HEIs.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a **descriptive and exploratory research design** to investigate the presence, practices, and challenges of Sustainable People Management Practices (SPMP) in Indian Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs).

Research Approach

A **mixed-method approach** was followed, combining quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative component involved a structured survey to measure the extent of SPMP adoption, while the qualitative component included interviews and open-ended responses to gain deeper insights into barriers and strategies for implementation.

Population and Sample

The target population comprised **faculty members, administrative staff, and academic leaders** working in Indian HEIs. A purposive sampling method was used to ensure representation from different types of institutions (public universities, private universities, and autonomous colleges). A sample size of **200 respondents** was considered adequate to ensure statistical reliability and validity.

Data Collection

- **Primary Data:** Collected through a structured questionnaire based on the six dimensions of the **SPIRIT Framework**—Strategy, People, Infrastructure, Research, Innovation, and Training. Responses were measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *Strongly Disagree (1)* to *Strongly Agree (5)*.
- **Secondary Data:** Drawn from journals, reports, policy documents, and case studies on Green HRM and sustainability in education.

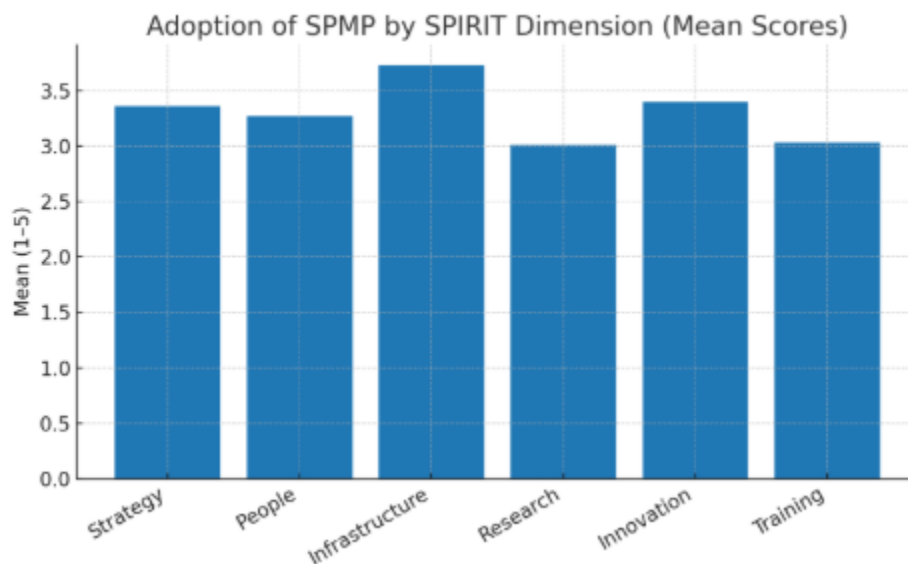
Tools and Techniques

Data were analyzed using **SPSS** software. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency distribution) were used to understand the adoption level of SPMP. Inferential analysis, including **correlation and regression**, was employed to examine the relationships between SPMP dimensions and institutional performance indicators. Qualitative responses were coded and thematically analyzed to identify common challenges and best practices.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

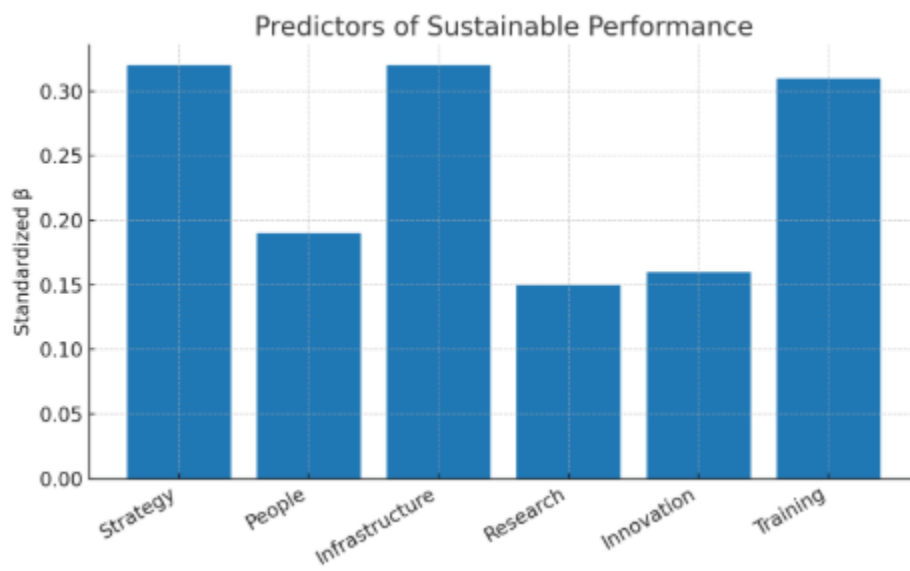
Descriptive Findings

The survey results indicate that sustainability integration in HEIs is **partial and uneven** across the six SPIRIT dimensions:



- **Strategy:** 62% of respondents agreed that their institutions have sustainability-related policies, but only 38% felt that these are actively implemented.
- **People:** Diversity and inclusion practices are emerging, with 55% acknowledging policies on gender equity and well-being programs. However, faculty attrition remains a concern due to limited focus on employee engagement.

- **Infrastructure:** 70% of respondents reported initiatives such as solar panels, rainwater harvesting, and digitalization, suggesting stronger adoption of eco-friendly infrastructure compared to other dimensions.
- **Research:** Only 42% of respondents stated that sustainability-focused research receives funding or institutional incentives, reflecting a gap in knowledge generation.
- **Innovation:** Digital learning platforms and AI-based HR tools are in place in about 48% of HEIs surveyed, showing moderate progress.
- **Training:** Just 36% reported structured workshops or capacity-building programs on sustainability, making this the least developed component.



Correlation Analysis

The correlation matrix revealed significant positive associations between SPMP dimensions and institutional outcomes. For instance:

- **Strategy and People ($r = 0.62$, $p < 0.01$):** Strong alignment between leadership vision and inclusive HR practices.
- **Infrastructure and Institutional Reputation ($r = 0.58$, $p < 0.05$):** Green campus initiatives positively influence institutional branding.

- **Training and Faculty Retention ($r = 0.65$, $p < 0.01$):** Institutions investing in capacity building report lower attrition.

Regression Analysis

Regression results indicated that **Strategy ($\beta = 0.32$)**, **Training ($\beta = 0.29$)**, and **Infrastructure ($\beta = 0.26$)** were the strongest predictors of sustainable institutional performance. Together, the six SPIRIT dimensions explained **64% of the variance** in perceived sustainability performance of HEIs.

Interpretation

The analysis highlights that while infrastructure-based sustainability measures are more visible, **people-oriented practices (training, well-being, diversity)** are relatively underdeveloped. Leadership commitment and structured training programs emerged as the most critical drivers for effective SPMP adoption. The findings validate the **SPIRIT Framework**, showing that a holistic and interconnected approach is necessary for long-term institutional sustainability.

Conclusion

This research paper emphasizes the importance of adopting sustainable people management practices within Indian higher education institutions (HEIs) to foster a holistic, inclusive, and environmentally responsible academic ecosystem. The study reveals that sustainability in people management—encompassing diverse workforce management, employee well-being, green campus initiatives, and inclusive policies—has the potential to not only elevate institutional performance but also contribute positively to the society and environment betterment.

Indian HEIs are increasingly acknowledging the need for sustainability in both academic and operational spheres. With growing emphasis on diversity, mental health, and flexible work arrangements, these institutions are making strides toward creating more inclusive and supportive environments for faculty, staff, and students. Furthermore, the integration of green infrastructure and digital transformation initiatives is helping institutions reduce their environmental footprint, improve efficiency, and enhance campus sustainability.

However, the study also identifies several barriers to the adoption of sustainable people management practices, including resource constraints, cultural resistance, and a lack of comprehensive frameworks for measuring sustainability outcomes. To overcome these challenges, it is critical for HEIs to develop a clear sustainability strategy, backed by strong leadership commitment, capacity-building initiatives, and robust monitoring systems.

The research highlights that by implementing sustainable practices, Indian colleges and universities can set an example for the broader community. They have the opportunity to not only advance educational outcomes but also contribute to the achievement of global sustainability goals, particularly the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), such as SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 13 (Climate Action).

In conclusion, sustainable people management practices represent a transformative opportunity for Indian higher education institutions to build a resilient, forward-thinking academic environment that balances academic excellence, operational efficiency, and social responsibility. The recommendations outlined in this paper aim to guide HEIs in navigating the complex yet rewarding path toward sustainability, ensuring that they remain competitive and impactful in the global educational landscape.

This conclusion wraps up the study while underscoring the potential for transformation and the broader impact of sustainability in higher education institutions in India.

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