

The Implementation and Challenges of Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) Practices to Foster Employee Green Performance (EGP) in Multinational Corporations (MNCs) in Shanghai

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Abstract— *The rise of green human resource management (GHRM) has made sustainability a key priority for businesses, particularly multinational corporations (MNCs) operating in global financial hubs like Shanghai. This study examines the current situation regarding implementation and challenges to GHRM practices amongst Shanghai MNCs with focus on influencing employee green performance (EGP). As Shanghai strengthens its environmental policies and corporate ESG commitments, MNCs are under increasing pressure to integrate sustainability into their workforce management. Many have adopted green recruitment, training and performance evaluation to encourage environmentally responsible behaviours. However, challenges persist as the city's diverse workforce, complex regulatory environment and high employee turnover create barriers to the successful implementation of GHRM. While research suggests that effective GHRM enhances employee engagement and environmental performance, the direct impact of these practices in Shanghai remains underexplored. This study highlights a gap in understanding how GHRM drives EGP in this unique business landscape, calling for further research into potential mediating factors in fostering sustainable workplace behaviours, providing valuable insights for companies aiming to refine their sustainability strategies, reinforcing Shanghai's position as a leader in corporate environmental responsibility.*

Keywords— *GHRM; Shanghai MNCs; employee green performance; sustainability; HR.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The importance of human resource management (HRM) has historically been widely recognised amongst academicians and practitioners, establishing a research consensus over its provided benefits including the development of a synergised operational system, a highly motivated organisational culture, employee satisfaction and sustainable development of employees (Galeic & Klindzic, 2020). However, the evolution of HRM practices has addressed the rapidly evolving nature of the modern business landscape, requiring firms to consistently aware of key HRM initiatives and needs to achieve competitive advantages (Lina et al., 2016). Similarly, the emergence of Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) is a response to the growing global awareness of environmental sustainability and the need for businesses to adopt practices that minimise their ecological footprint

(Renwick et al., 2016). This concept has its roots in the broader movement towards corporate social responsibility (CSR) and sustainable development, which emphasises the triple bottom line of economic, social and environmental performance (Farooq et al., 2021). GHRM specifically addresses the environmental pillar by integrating environmental considerations into traditional HRM functions such as recruitment, training, performance evaluation and employee engagement (Khan et al., 2023).

According to Tsymbaliuk et al. (2023), the GHRM concept brings environmental management into the realm of conventional HRM practices, encouraging employees to adopt eco-friendly behaviours and ensuring HR policies are in sync with green targets, as the progression of GHRM reflects a growing awareness of businesses' environmental impacts and the broader necessity for sustainable practices. As companies encounter escalating demands from stakeholders such as governments, consumers and advocacy groups to minimise ecological damage and utilise resources efficiently, GHRM practices have become vital in nurturing a culture of sustainability within organisations (Jamal et al., 2021). These practices include a range of initiatives, from green recruitment and training to performance management systems that emphasise environmental considerations (Alnajdawi, 2024). Moreover, the relevance of GHRM is accentuated by the pressing global issues of climate change and the exhaustion of natural resources, as Miah et al.'s (2024) systematic literature review on GHRM indicates that environmental management and environmental sustainability were identified as the most popular themes among studies in this field.

Businesses that proactively engage in GHRM not only contribute to environmental preservation but also secure competitive edges by lowering costs, bolstering their public image and enhancing employee satisfaction and retention (Afum et al., 2019). For example, green training initiatives empower employees with the necessary skills and knowledge for eco-conscious actions, promoting sustainable operations within the business (Renwick et al., 2016). Additionally, evidence suggests that GHRM positively impacts employees' green performance, with elements like employee engagement and individual personality traits significantly influencing this

dynamic (Ababneh, 2021). As the corporate environment continues to shift, GHRM remains an evolving domain, with current research exploring into its effects in diverse cultural and organisational settings and its alignment with wider corporate strategies (Khan & Muktar, 2020). Thus, it is of substantial research importance to explore on the contemporary implementation of GHRM practices, especially in one of the fastest growing metropolitan cities, Shanghai, which has yet to receive adequate city-specific research with focus on GHRM implementation and challenges.

II. DISCUSSIONS

Shanghai's MNCs

As China's most developed economy, Shanghai is an epicentre for Multinational Corporations (MNCs) looking to tap into the vast potential of the Chinese and broader Asian markets, despite the spatial outward FDI outside of China in the aftermath of the COVID pandemic (Xie et al., 2024). The city's strategic position, coupled with China's economic policies, has attracted a multitude of foreign investments, leading to a proliferation of MNCs across various sectors and has fast become a hub with major flagship stores and regional headquarters from MNCs (Zhang, 2022). The economic importance of Shanghai's MNCs is undeniable, contributing significantly to the city's GDP, driving technological advancements and creating vast employment opportunities (Su et al., 2022). The presence of these MNCs has also spurred the growth of ancillary industries and services, further bolstering Shanghai's position as a global financial hub. The city's commitment to innovation and continuous infrastructural development makes it an attractive destination for MNCs looking to establish or expand their Asian footprint (Su et al., 2021).

However, this rapid economic growth brings with it unique challenges, especially in the realm of sustainability and human resource management given the rapid development of Shanghai's free trade zones that has driven competition for financial and environmental performances (Wang & Kong, 2024). Moreover, the culturally diverse workforce of Shanghai's MNCs, with employees from different nationalities, backgrounds and values, requires a renewed approach to management, particularly in aligning the diverse workforce with the company's environmental and sustainability goals (Zhao et al., 2021). The cultural diversity within these MNCs is not just a challenge but also an asset, as it brings a variety of perspectives on how to address environmental issues and implement sustainable practices. The economic prominence and cultural diversity of Shanghai's MNCs make the study of Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) in this context particularly interesting and relevant. Thus, understanding how these corporations effectively manage the complex relationship between economic imperatives and environmental responsibility can provide valuable insights into the future of sustainable business practices in one of the world's most dynamic and influential cities.

Current application of GHRM in Shanghai

The landscape of Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) in Shanghai is significantly influenced by the city's strategic position as China's most populous metropolitan area and a hub for multinational corporations (MNCs) that drives digital transformation and enterprise green dual innovation (Zhu, 2024). Since the economic reforms of 1978, Shanghai has witnessed a robust influx of foreign investments which have brought with them a combination of international HRM practices that intertwine with local business operations (Goodall & Warner, 1998). This integration has driven the evolution from traditional, hierarchical management structures typical in Chinese firms to more flexible, employee-centred HR strategies. Recent developments in GHRM within Shanghai showcase an increasing adoption of sustainable HRM practices augmented by digital innovations, reflecting a shift towards modern management paradigms prioritising environmental sustainability (Zhao & Du, 2023). However, the implementation of these green practices within the frameworks of global HR policies, while also complying with local legal and cultural norms, presents distinct challenges. The complexities are amplified by Shanghai's dynamic job market characterised by high turnover rates, which complicates the retention of talent skilled in advanced GHRM practices (Huo et al., 2020).

Despite these obstacles, the ongoing transformation in HRM strategies presents substantial opportunities for companies to pioneer environmental sustainability initiatives as coined by Luo & Feng's (2024) term of being "accelerator" for sustainable development. These initiatives are crucial as they contribute not only to global ecological efforts but also to the enhancement of Employee Green Performance (EGP). EGP in Shanghai's context has become an increasingly critical metric for assessing the efficacy of GHRM practices. As organisations integrate these green practices, they not only adhere to environmental regulations but also boost their corporate reputation and employee satisfaction, resulting in a clear positive relationship between ESG performance and corporate green innovation according to Wu et al.' (2024). The role of GHRM in enhancing EGP becomes evident as it fosters a work culture that encourages employees to engage in environmentally sustainable behaviours actively. These behaviours range from energy conservation and waste reduction to innovative practices that further corporate sustainability goals. Moreover, effective GHRM practices, such as training and development focused on sustainability, performance management systems that reward green behaviours and leadership that champions environmental stewardship, are instrumental in elevating EGP within firms (Ye et al., 2022).

Current application of GHRM in Shanghai MNCs

In the context of MNCs in Shanghai, the current situation of GHRM is characterised by a complex combination of global influences and local cultural dynamics. The influence of Western HRM practices due to globalisation and the international nature of operations in MNCs has led to the adoption of more participative and performance-based management styles (Farley et al., 2020). However, the

successful integration of these practices requires a multi-dimensional understanding of the local context, including cultural values and expectations of the local workforce (Pereira et al., 2019). This has led to the development of hybrid HRM practices that combines Western and Eastern philosophies to effectively manage a diverse and dynamic workforce. The shift towards GHRM in Shanghai's MNCs is indicative of a growing need for HR professionals who are well-versed in global sustainability practices and possess a deep understanding of local culture and business practices (Shen et al., 2019). Continuous training and development, fostering cross-cultural understanding and developing flexible GHRM policies are crucial for these MNCs to successfully overcome the challenges of managing cross-cultural teams, adhering to local norms and retaining talent. As these MNCs innovate in their GHRM practices and align their strategies with both global environmental goals and local cultural values, they stand to gain competitive advantages, attract eco-conscious talent and consumers and position themselves as leaders in sustainable business practices (Sparrow et al., 2016; Shen et al., 2019).

One of the most notable initiatives is the "Shanghai Energy Conservation Regulation" and the "Shanghai Household Waste Management Regulation". According to Chen et al., (2023), these regulations mandate energy-saving measures and promote waste reduction practices, encouraging MNCs to adopt green strategies within their operations in combination with the new landmark rule introduced in 2024 emphasises green transformation across various sectors, including energy development and industrial structure, pushing organisations to integrate sustainable practices deeply (Shanghai Gov, 2024). The city's commitment to reducing carbon emissions is evident in its implementation of the "14th Five-Year Plan" (FYP) for green transformations amongst enterprises, mandating that all enterprises must cohere to new green standards, for example all new civil buildings meet specific green building standards, aiming to achieve significant reductions in carbon emissions from office buildings (Terao Asia News, 2022). These stringent regulations encourage MNCs to invest in green building technologies and adopt energy-efficient practices, which in turn fosters a culture of sustainability among employees (Wu & Gao, 2022). The combination of rigorous local policies and supportive financial mechanisms in Shanghai is driving MNCs to prioritise employee green performance, helping local companies and MNCs to meet their environmental objectives that requires enhanced employee engagement and satisfaction by fostering a workplace culture centred on green behaviours.

Amidst this backdrop, Employee Green Performance (EGP) has emerged as a critical focus area within these MNCs. The significance of EGP is underscored by Shanghai's role as a global financial hub and its high density of MNCs, which amplifies the impact of corporate sustainability efforts (Zhao & Du, 2023). The local environmental challenges and China's broader sustainable development goals necessitate a strategic approach to fostering green performances at the organisational level. This approach aligns with the national emphasis on ecological civilisation and the "Beautiful China"

initiative, which seek to balance economic growth with environmental health (Ding et al., 2023; Tao & Xiang, 2022). Executive support for sustainability and the efficiency of GHRM practices in promoting EGP are directly correlated, according to additional research on the leadership position in these companies. Leaders that exhibit a sincere dedication to sustainability principles have a significant impact on their organizations, integrating environmental concerns into everyday operations and corporate strategies. This leadership commitment is essential for fostering a workplace culture where green performances are actively promoted and valued (Zhao et al., 2024; Huo et al., 2020). Moreover, the integration of environmental management into HR practices such as eco-friendly recruitment, green training and sustainability performance metrics is increasingly recognised for its effectiveness in enhancing the overall environmental performance of organisations in Shanghai.

These GHRM practices encourage green behaviours and performances and also help in attracting and retaining talent who prioritise environmental ethics in their employment choices, thereby strengthening the organisation's competitive advantage and leadership in sustainable business practices (Ye et al., 2022). As Shanghai continues to face significant environmental challenges, including air pollution and waste management issues, the role of MNCs in promoting green employee behaviours becomes increasingly vital. These corporations are often better equipped with global resources and expertise to implement advanced sustainable solutions that can serve as benchmarks for both local and international markets. This strategic positioning is crucial for MNCs to overcome the regulatory landscape, enhance their market competitiveness and lead in the adoption of innovative green technologies and practices (Xie et al., 2024; Jia et al., 2023). Overall, the commitment of MNCs in Shanghai to GHRM and EGP addresses local and global sustainability challenges and sets new standards for corporate environmental responsibility worldwide. The ongoing development and implementation of effective GHRM practices in these corporations will continue to play a pivotal role in shaping the future of sustainable business practices, both within China and across the global business landscape.

Challenges of GHRM in Shanghai MNCs

With an increasing emphasis on sustainable practices within the global business arena, understanding the dynamics of Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) and its impact on Employee Green Performance (EGP) within multinational corporations (MNCs) in Shanghai has become a focal area of interest. However, there is an apparent research gap due to the lack of studies conducted on exploring the level of EGP in Shanghai MNCs despite recognition of substantial green initiatives and developments in Shanghai MNCs in recent years. According to a report by the Shanghai Gov (2022), increasing green efforts amongst corporations in Shanghai have resulted in the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions per unit of GDP and energy consumption per unit of GDP by over 50% between 2010 and 2022, of which over 300 MNCs have contributed to this green achievement. Another

report by Bains (2023) highlighted that over 75% of MNCs in Shanghai have integrated comprehensive sustainability programmes, focusing on reducing carbon emissions, improving energy efficiency and promoting recycling and waste management practices as of 2023. Moreover, statements by Chinese president Xi Jinping stressing “ecological protection to the high quality development of the Yangtze River Delta regions surrounding Shanghai” as well as top down regulations driving “inter-provincial consultation and joint ecological conservation and make sure that all localities are on board of their shared development initiatives for the benefit of all”, making all MNCs in Shanghai directly liable to oblige to the sustainability commitments discussed by the government (NZ Foreign Affairs & Trade, 2024). This highlights that whilst MNCs in Shanghai are increasingly active in performing green behaviours, achieving substantial improvements in areas of green and sustainability from an organisational level, there remains a lack of understanding and data towards the actual improvements of EGP from the perspective of employees, representing a key gap that future studies should aim to address.

Moreover, Shanghai’s position as a global financial and business hub highlights the critical role of sustainable practices in its MNCs especially in areas of Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) and employee green performance due to increasing regulatory and societal expectations with much recent data highlighting the urgency for green transformation. According to the 2024 Shanghai ESG Development Report, over 91% of listed financial firms in Shanghai disclosed ESG reports, demonstrating their commitment to integrating sustainability into operations (China Daily, 2024). Similarly, the Shanghai Stock Exchange reported that 2,272 companies disclosed annual ESG data in 2023, with 1,149 providing separate ESG reports, reflecting a robust push toward transparency in sustainability efforts (SSE, 2024). Employee engagement also plays a pivotal role as highlighted at the MNC Future Summit, where redesigning employee experiences and fostering local leadership were identified as essential to advancing sustainability goals (Deloitte, 2024). Additionally, MNCs in Shanghai are responding to government initiatives that promote high-quality growth by encouraging employees to adopt sustainable behaviours (Yicai Global, 2024). In this context, GHRM practices and their impact on employee green performance are essential for maintaining competitiveness and ensuring alignment with Shanghai’s green transformation objectives.

The combination of Western management influences and traditional Chinese business practices have prompted a shift towards more adaptive and participative HR strategies, highlighting the pivotal role of GHRM in fostering green performances amongst employees. This offers valuable research importance due to the apparent differences in organisational culture and operational standards amongst traditional Chinese businesses in comparison to MNCs according to Cooke et al., (2020), arguing that traditional Chinese businesses often emphasise hierarchical structures and relationship-based recruitment, with a focus on loyalty and conformity in performance management. In contrast,

MNCs adopt structured, merit-based HRM practices that emphasise continuous training, clear performance metrics and global best practices. Subsequently, MNCs are more proactive in integrating GHRM practices, driven by global sustainability goals and advanced environmental management systems, while traditional Chinese businesses would focus more on regulatory compliance with local environmental policies (Cooke et al., 2020). Furthermore, the Shanghai Municipal Commission of Commerce (2024) outlines an action plan for accelerating the improvement of environmental, social and governance (ESG) and green capabilities of foreign-related enterprises in Shanghai, mandating the full coverage of ESG and GHRM information disclosure in company operations by 2026, further raising the research importance to understand how this growing trend of green developments will impact the ESP of employees within MNCs in Shanghai.

As highlighted by seminal works such as those of Darvishmotevali & Altinay (2022) and Ababneh (2021), there is a critical examination of how GHRM practices mediate various green behaviours among employees by focusing on factors such as environmental awareness, servant leadership and the overarching organisational culture. Darvishmotevali & Altinay's (2022) research within the tourism sector, utilising theories like social exchange and resource-based views, emphasises how servant leadership enhances the efficacy of GHRM practices in promoting green behaviours. Conversely, Ababneh (2021) broadens the perspective by integrating employee engagement and personality traits, revealing how these elements magnify the impact of GHRM on green behaviours within a broader organisational context. Their findings underscored the amplifying effect of servant leadership on Green HRM's efficacy. However, the study's confined focus on the tourism sector leaves a gap in its applicability across diverse industries and geographic contexts.

III. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite these empirical efforts in the burgeoning fields of EGP and GHRM that has garnered increasing research attention from scholars and practitioners alike (Jia et al., 2021; Hameed et al., 2020; Aboramadan, 2022), the specific implications of these practices within Shanghai's MNCs remain under-explored. Shanghai serves as a global economic hub with a unique position in China’s push towards sustainable development, marked by a dense concentration of corporate activity and significant environmental challenges. The city's strategic importance is underscored by its numerous MNCs, which are pivotal in shaping sustainable corporate practices influenced by both global and local regulatory frameworks (Ye et al., 2022). This gap becomes even more pronounced considering the unique interplay of global standards, indigenous organisational cultures, distinctive management philosophies and a multifaceted workforce in these corporations. The studies by Darvishmotevali & Altinay (2022) and Ababneh (2021) further accentuate this oversight, highlighting the pressing need for a more detailed of understanding how EGP is effectively stimulated. In response to this apparent research gap, future studies should offer a

multidimensional examination of achieving EGP within Shanghai's MNCs.

It is recommended that future studies should explore deeper into the influence of GHRM on EGP within Shanghai's MNCs by exploring how these practices are implemented in response to the city's environmental policies and global sustainability targets. Through examining these relationships, future studies can provide a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted impacts of GHRM on EGP in a critical locale for global business operations. Moreover, when integrating these elements into a cohesive analysis, future studies can contribute valuable insights into the effective management and stimulation of green employee performances and behaviours in one of the world's leading cities for international business and environmental innovation. From a theoretical and empirical perspective, despite existing studies recognising clear relationships between servant leadership (Gu & Liu, 2022), Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) (Noor et al., 2023; Ahmad et al., 2023) and individual traits with green employee performance (Szostek, 2021), there remains a significant research gap in the context of Shanghai's multinational corporations (MNCs). Previous research has established that these independent variables (IVs) positively influence green employee performance (DV); however, the specific effects within Shanghai's unique regulatory and cultural environment have not been thoroughly examined. Additionally, future should explore the potential mediating on achieving EGP through particular GHRM practices, providing specific insights and actionable plans for Shanghai MNCs to implement to overcome potential challenges and achieve specific business performance, and environmental goals.

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