

Review of Sustainable Human Resource Management Practices in the Hospitality and Tourism Industry

Prashant Adsule¹ and Dr. Abhay Rajput²

¹Research Scholar, Department of HR Management

²Research Guide, Department of HR Management

Vikrant University, Gwalior, M.P.

Abstract: *Sustainable Human Resource Management has emerged as an important approach for promoting environmental responsibility, social equity, employee well-being, and long-term organizational performance in the hospitality and tourism industry. This industry depends heavily on human resources because service quality, customer satisfaction, organizational reputation, and business competitiveness are directly influenced by employee knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviour. However, hospitality and tourism organizations frequently face challenges such as high employee turnover, seasonal employment, long working hours, skills shortages, wage inequality, and increasing environmental concerns.*

Keywords: Sustainable Human Resource Management, Employee Well-Being, Sustainable Development, Employee Retention, Organizational Performance.

I. INTRODUCTION

The hospitality and tourism industry is a significant contributor to employment generation, economic development, cultural exchange, and international business. Hotels, restaurants, resorts, airlines, travel agencies, and tourism destinations depend on skilled and motivated employees to provide high-quality services and create positive customer experiences. At the same time, the industry faces increasing pressure to reduce its environmental footprint, improve labour conditions, promote ethical employment, and maintain financial stability. These concerns have encouraged organizations to adopt sustainable management practices that balance economic objectives with environmental protection and social responsibility.

Human resource management plays a central role in achieving these objectives because employees implement organizational policies and influence everyday operational practices. Sustainable Human Resource Management extends conventional HRM by considering the long-term consequences of employment decisions for employees, organizations, society, and the natural environment. Its application in hospitality and tourism involves developing fair recruitment procedures, providing sustainability-focused training, ensuring safe working conditions, supporting work-life balance, encouraging employee participation, and rewarding responsible workplace behaviour.

For example, hotels can train housekeeping employees to reduce water consumption, encourage kitchen staff to minimize food waste, and incorporate environmental and social criteria into employee performance evaluations. Tourism businesses can also improve workforce sustainability by offering equal opportunities, developing local talent, supporting career progression, and protecting seasonal and contract workers from unfair treatment. These measures can improve employee motivation while supporting responsible tourism development.

Nevertheless, implementing sustainable HRM requires more than introducing environmental policies. Organizations must ensure that sustainability commitments are reflected in recruitment, compensation, training, leadership, and

employee relations. This review therefore examines the principal practices, benefits, challenges, and future opportunities associated with sustainable human resource management in the hospitality and tourism industry.

CONCEPT AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Sustainable Human Resource Management refers to the systematic development and implementation of HR policies that support long-term organizational viability while protecting employee well-being, promoting social responsibility, and reducing negative environmental impacts. Unlike conventional HRM, which may emphasize productivity and immediate organizational performance, sustainable HRM considers the long-term effects of workforce decisions on multiple stakeholders.

Green Human Resource Management is closely related to sustainable HRM but generally places greater emphasis on environmental objectives, such as energy conservation, waste reduction, and environmentally responsible employee behaviour. Sustainable HRM adopts a broader perspective by integrating environmental sustainability with fair employment, employee development, inclusion, occupational health, and economic resilience.

Several theoretical perspectives help explain its relevance. The stakeholder theory emphasizes the importance of considering employees, customers, local communities, suppliers, and the environment in organizational decisions. The resource-based view suggests that employees' knowledge, skills, commitment, and collective capabilities can provide a source of competitive advantage. The social exchange perspective proposes that employees may respond positively when organizations demonstrate fairness, support, and concern for their well-being. Together, these perspectives explain how responsible HR practices can support employee engagement and organizational sustainability.

MAJOR SUSTAINABLE HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

1. Sustainable Recruitment and Selection

Sustainable recruitment involves selecting employees whose professional competencies, ethical values, and environmental awareness align with organizational sustainability goals. Hospitality organizations can incorporate sustainability-related responsibilities into job descriptions and assess applicants' understanding of responsible service delivery. For example, hotels may recruit candidates who demonstrate knowledge of resource conservation, waste management, ethical customer service, and community engagement. However, sustainability criteria should remain job-relevant and must not create unfair barriers to applicants from different educational or socioeconomic backgrounds.

TRAINING AND EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT

Training is essential for translating sustainability policies into everyday workplace behaviour. Employees can receive instruction on energy conservation, water management, food waste prevention, responsible purchasing, customer relations, workplace safety, and inclusive service delivery. Housekeeping employees may be trained to use cleaning materials efficiently, while restaurant employees can learn food inventory management and waste reduction techniques. Continuous professional development also supports career progression, improves service quality, and helps organizations retain skilled employees.

SUSTAINABLE PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Sustainable performance management incorporates environmental, social, and economic indicators into employee appraisal systems. Rather than evaluating employees exclusively on productivity or customer satisfaction, organizations can also consider teamwork, ethical conduct, resource efficiency, service quality, and contribution to sustainability initiatives. For instance, department managers may monitor food waste reduction, responsible use of hotel supplies, and compliance with workplace safety standards. Performance indicators should be realistic, measurable, transparent, and appropriate to each employee's role.

COMPENSATION, REWARDS, AND RECOGNITION

Compensation and recognition systems can motivate employees to participate in sustainability initiatives. Organizations may provide rewards for innovative waste-reduction ideas, recognition for excellent customer service, and incentives for teams that achieve measurable environmental improvements. Nevertheless, sustainable compensation must also include fair wages, transparent promotion procedures, equal pay for comparable work, and appropriate benefits. Environmental incentives cannot compensate for poor working conditions or inadequate remuneration.

EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Hospitality and tourism employees frequently work irregular shifts, weekends, holidays, and extended hours. These conditions can contribute to fatigue, stress, dissatisfaction, and employee turnover. Sustainable HRM addresses such concerns through fair scheduling, adequate rest periods, manageable workloads, supportive supervision, access to employee assistance, and opportunities for career development. Organizations should also promote psychological safety, respectful communication, and protection against harassment and discrimination. Employee well-being is a central component of sustainable workforce management rather than an optional benefit.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

A sustainable hospitality workforce should provide equal employment opportunities regardless of gender, disability, age, socioeconomic background, or other irrelevant personal characteristics. Inclusive recruitment, accessible workplaces, fair promotion procedures, and anti-harassment policies help create a respectful organizational culture. Tourism businesses can also strengthen local employment by developing training opportunities for community members and supporting career pathways for underrepresented groups. These practices can improve organizational legitimacy while contributing to inclusive economic development.

EMPLOYEE PARTICIPATION AND GREEN ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Sustainability initiatives are more effective when employees understand their purpose and can participate in decision-making. Hospitality organizations can establish green teams, employee suggestion schemes, departmental sustainability meetings, and staff-led improvement projects. Employees working directly with guests and operational processes often possess practical knowledge about resource waste and service inefficiencies. Encouraging their participation helps management identify realistic improvements and develop a workplace culture in which sustainability is treated as a shared responsibility.

SUSTAINABLE HRM PRACTICES AND THEIR EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The literature indicates that sustainable and green HRM practices may contribute to employee engagement, environmental performance, and organizational effectiveness, although outcomes depend on implementation quality and organizational context. A 2025 integrative systematic review synthesized 77 empirical studies on green HRM in hospitality and tourism and identified the need for stronger multilevel research, broader geographical coverage, and closer examination of adverse outcomes such as employee burnout and green washing.

Table 1. Major Sustainable HRM Practices in the Hospitality and Tourism Industry

Sustainable HRM practice	Examples of implementation	Expected outcomes
Sustainable recruitment	Include sustainability responsibilities in job descriptions and selection criteria	Better alignment between employee capabilities and organizational goals
Employee training	Provide training on waste reduction, energy conservation, safety, and service quality	Improved skills and responsible workplace behaviour
Sustainable performance appraisal	Assess service quality, ethical conduct, and resource efficiency	Greater accountability and operational improvement

Fair compensation and rewards	Ensure equitable pay and recognize meaningful sustainability contributions	Motivation, fairness, and employee commitment
Employee well-being	Improve shift scheduling, rest periods, workload management, and support	Reduced fatigue and potentially improved retention
Diversity and inclusion	Promote equal opportunities, accessibility, and anti-discrimination measures	More inclusive workplaces and fairer career opportunities
Employee participation	Establish green teams and employee-led improvement programmes	Increased engagement and practical sustainability innovation
Career development	Offer mentoring, skills development, and internal promotion opportunities	Improved employability and organizational knowledge retention
Ethical employment	Maintain transparent contracts and fair treatment of employees	Trust, organizational credibility, and reduced employment-related risks
Sustainable leadership	Integrate sustainability into managerial decisions and organizational policies	Greater consistency between stated commitments and actual practices

Source: Author's synthesis of sustainable HRM concepts and the hospitality-focused review literature. The outcomes are expected relationships, not guaranteed effects in every organization.

REVIEW OF EXISTING LITERATURE

Existing research has increasingly examined the contribution of green HRM and sustainable workforce practices to responsible hospitality management. The literature emphasizes that recruitment, training, employee motivation, leadership, and performance management should be considered interconnected elements of sustainability rather than isolated interventions.

Susanto et al. (2022) reviewed green HRM research in the hospitality industry and highlighted its relationship with the ability–motivation–opportunity framework, environmental management systems, financial outcomes, corporate image, and environmental performance. Their review demonstrates the importance of connecting human resource practices with broader organizational sustainability objectives.

Mohanty et al. (2021) examined the integration of environmental responsibility and HRM practices in the hotel industry. Their work emphasized the growing relevance of green HRM and the need to extend traditional human resource practices to address environmental concerns.

A systematic review published in Sustainability in 2023 examined green HRM in the hotel industry and further contributed to understanding the implementation of environmentally responsible HR practices. The study reflects the growing academic interest in linking employee management with environmental sustainability in hotel operations.

More recently, Suleman et al. (2025) synthesized 77 empirical studies using an integrative multilevel approach. Their review identified research gaps involving geographical representation, theoretical development, methodological quality, and the possibility of unintended consequences, including employee burnout and greenwashing.

Collectively, these studies indicate that sustainable HRM is a developing research area. However, environmental practices must be integrated with employee well-being, fair employment, social inclusion, and long-term workforce development to provide a comprehensive understanding of sustainability in hospitality and tourism.

Table 2. Summary of Selected Literature

Author(s) and year	Research focus	Main contribution
Mohanty et al. (2021)	Green HRM in the hotel industry	Discussed the integration of environmental responsibility into HRM
Susanto et al. (2022)	Systematic review of green HRM in hospitality	Examined research themes, theoretical approaches, and organizational outcomes
Sustainability review (2023)	Green HRM in the hotel industry	Contributed to the synthesis of green workforce management practices

Suleman et al. (2025)	Integrative review of green HRM in hospitality and tourism	Synthesized 77 empirical studies and identified theoretical and methodological gaps
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Source: Selected published reviews. The table summarizes their broad focus rather than reproducing individual study results.

BENEFITS OF SUSTAINABLE HRM IN HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM

Sustainable HRM can provide several benefits when its policies are implemented consistently and supported by organizational leadership.

First, it can improve employee engagement by demonstrating that the organization values employees' contributions and professional development. Employees who receive appropriate training, fair treatment, and opportunities to participate in decision-making may develop stronger organizational commitment.

Second, sustainable HRM can support employee retention. Fair compensation, career development, manageable workloads, and respectful supervision can help address common workforce challenges in hospitality, where employee turnover and seasonal employment can disrupt service continuity.

Third, sustainability-oriented training and employee participation can improve environmental performance. Employees can help reduce food waste, conserve water, minimize unnecessary energy consumption, and use materials more efficiently. Such improvements may reduce operating costs while supporting environmental objectives.

Fourth, sustainable HRM can strengthen customer service and organizational reputation. Employees who understand sustainability policies can communicate responsible business practices to customers and contribute to consistent service delivery. However, organizations should ensure that environmental claims are supported by actual operational evidence.

Finally, sustainable HRM may support local communities through inclusive recruitment, skills development, fair employment opportunities, and collaboration with local educational institutions. These practices can strengthen the relationship between tourism businesses and the destinations in which they operate.

CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING SUSTAINABLE HRM

Despite its potential benefits, sustainable HRM faces several implementation challenges.

Financial constraints: Small hotels, restaurants, and tourism enterprises may lack the resources needed to develop formal training programmes, employee support systems, and sustainability monitoring tools.

Limited managerial commitment: Sustainability initiatives may remain superficial when managers prioritize short-term financial targets over long-term workforce development.

High employee turnover: Frequent staff changes can increase recruitment and training costs and make it difficult to maintain consistent sustainability practices.

Seasonal employment: Fluctuating tourism demand can complicate workforce planning, employee development, and the provision of stable working conditions.

Inadequate measurement: Organizations may struggle to determine whether sustainability-oriented HR policies produce measurable improvements in employee retention, well-being, or environmental performance.

Risk of greenwashing: Organizations may promote themselves as environmentally responsible without implementing meaningful changes to working conditions or operational practices.

Employee overload: Additional sustainability duties can create stress when they are introduced without sufficient staffing, training, time, or managerial support.

These challenges indicate that sustainability initiatives should be designed according to organizational size, workforce needs, and operational capacity. Recent review research also emphasizes the need to investigate the unintended consequences of green HRM instead of assuming that every intervention produces positive results.

II. CONCLUSION

Sustainable Human Resource Management represents an important approach to developing a responsible, resilient, and competitive hospitality and tourism industry. By integrating environmental protection, social responsibility, employee well-being, and long-term organizational development into HR policies, hospitality organizations can address workforce challenges while contributing to sustainable tourism.

The review highlights the importance of sustainable recruitment, employee training, performance management, fair compensation, employee participation, workplace inclusion, and supportive leadership. These practices can encourage responsible employee behaviour, improve working conditions, support workforce retention, and contribute to operational efficiency. However, their effectiveness depends on appropriate implementation, adequate resources, managerial commitment, and continuous evaluation.

A comprehensive approach must extend beyond environmental initiatives to include fair wages, manageable workloads, career opportunities, ethical employment, and meaningful employee participation. Organizations should also avoid imposing additional responsibilities without sufficient support and should ensure that sustainability claims reflect actual workplace and environmental outcomes.

In conclusion, sustainable HRM should be regarded as a long-term organizational strategy rather than a collection of isolated green initiatives. Further empirical and comparative research is necessary to understand how these practices operate across different hospitality and tourism contexts. When implemented fairly and evaluated systematically, sustainable HRM can help organizations balance employee interests, environmental responsibility, customer expectations, and economic performance.

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