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GREEN HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT – AN EMPLOYEE PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

In recent years, green human resource management (GHRM) has attracted increasing interest among scholars and practitioners. This study explores employees' perceptions regarding GHRM and their voluntary pro-environmental behavior in promoting GHRM in their employer organizations. Theoretically, the study builds upon the GHRM perspective and employees' pro-environmental behavior literature. Empirically, the study utilizes 11 semi-structured interviews that were generated among employees in three different companies located in the Moscow metropolitan area in 2019. The study identifies three different GHRM approaches: an unofficial, bottom-up GHRM approach, an official GHRM approach, and a strategic GHRM approach. The study contributes to the current GHRM literature by demonstrating that employees' voluntary pro-environmental behavior and active involvement in the promotion of green practices contribute to the development of GHRM at an organizational level. Furthermore, the findings indicate that cultural context has an influence on employees' voluntary pro-environmental behavior as well as the development of GHRM practices. From a managerial viewpoint, the study provides insights to supervisors and HR professionals how they can create GHRM practices that involve employees in the development process and promote sustainable development in an organizational context.

Keywords: Green Human Resource Management, Employee Perspective, Pro-Environmental Behavior, Qualitative Case Study

1. Introduction

Environmental issues have become an increasing sustainability challenge for governments and companies worldwide (Amrutha and Geetha, 2020; Norton *et al.* 2015). On one hand, companies are pushed towards a green path to meet new social and legal requirements, and stakeholders' expectations (Zhao *et al.* 2020; Wiernik *et al.* 2016). On the other hand, a sustainable way of doing business is seen as profitable in the long run because it can reduce companies' operating

costs (e.g., energy and water consumption) and increase their sales and brand value (Dumont *et al.* 2017). In the field of human resource management (HRM), green human resource management (GHRM) is seen a way to help businesses to adjust to new conditions and environmental requirements (Renwick *et al.* 2016).

During the last few years, there has been a growing interest towards GHRM among scholars and practitioners (see, e.g., Paulet *et al.* 2021; Zhao *et al.* 2020). Furthermore, GHRM is linked to a larger discussion of sustainable HRM, which is an emerging paradigm in the field of HRM (see, e.g., Paulet *et al.* 2021; De Prins *et al.* 2014). Until now, research has not provided a universally agreed upon definition for GHRM (De Prins *et al.* 2014). However, the underlying idea of GHRM is to achieve organizations' environmental goals and improve their organizational environmental performance through employees' performance (Shen *et al.* 2018). In this study, we follow the definition by Marhatta and Adhikari (2013, p. 2), who have defined GHRM as "*the use of HRM policies to promote the sustainable use of resources within organizations and, more generally, promotes the causes of environment sustainability*".

So far, many of the GHRM studies have focused on conceptualizations and theoretical underpinnings of GHRM (see, e.g., Stankeviciute and Savaneviciene, 2018). Whereas, empirical studies on GHRM have mainly been quantitative in nature investigating, for example, the organization- and employee-level outcomes of GHRM practices (Amrutha and Geetha, 2020; Hameed *et al.* 2020; Kim *et al.* 2019; Pinzone *et al.* 2016), only in a few recent GHRM studies, the importance of understanding employees' perceptions regarding GHRM has been highlighted (Chen *et al.* 2021; Shen *et al.* 2018). This strand of research is linked to a larger discussion in HRM, which stresses the importance of understanding how employees perceive and understand HRM practices provided by their employer organization because individuals' interpretations influence their work-related attitudes and behaviors (Guest, 2011). Building upon the abilities, motivation, and opportunities (AMO) theory (see, e.g., Pham *et al.* 2019; Shen *et al.* 2018) and identity theory (Shen *et al.* 2018), a few recent GHRM studies have investigated how perceived GHRM practices contribute to employees' pro-environmental behavior. However, less attention has been given to employees' active involvement in promoting organizational green practices and policies, although they play a crucial role in implementing these green policies and practices (Dumont *et al.* 2017).

This qualitative case study adopts an employee-level perspective to empirically investigate how employees perceive the GHRM practices of their employer organization and how they describe their voluntary pro-environmental behavior in the Russian context. The contribution of this study is two-fold. First, this study focuses on an under-researched area in GHRM — the role of employees' voluntary pro-environmental behavior and active involvement in the promotion and development of GHRM — and provides an enriched view to employees' perceptions regarding GHRM. Until now, GHRM studies have mainly seen employees' pro-environmental behavior as an outcome of GHRM practices (Shen *et al.* 2018), rather than an issue affecting those practices. Second, a majority of the GHRM studies have been conducted in European and Asian countries (Amrutha and Geetha, 2020). To the best of our knowledge, there is only one study that has examined employees' pro-environmental behavior in the Russian context (Graves *et al.* 2019) and one study that has focused on GHRM practices in Russia (Arzamasova and Esaulova, 2020a). Additionally, two recent studies (Arzamasova, 2020; Arzamasova and Cherepanov, 2020) have tried to integrate HRM and ecological management in the Russian context. This is somewhat surprising because the ecological footprint of Russia is one of the largest in the world (Graves *et al.* 2019).

Empirically, this study analyzes qualitative data consisting of 11 semi-structured interviews with office employees from three companies located in the metropolitan area of Moscow, to identify different GRHM approaches and their contents. Therefore, the study provides a novel perspective on the employees' perceptions regarding GHRM by focusing on how employees perceive the GHRM practices of their employer organization and how they enact voluntary pro-environmental behavior at work.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Green human resource management

HRM is a managerial function that focuses on employee-related organizational activities (Renwick *et al.* 2016) and thereby interacts closely with employees (Ahmad, 2015; Saeed *et al.* 2018). Currently, the field of HRM is facing a paradigm shift due to companies' increasing interest in integrating sustainability aspects into their HRM strategies and practices (Järlström *et al.* 2018; Kramar, 2014). Compared to strategic HRM, which has been a dominant paradigm in the field of HRM, the sustainable HRM approach stresses a long-term focus on organizations' ecological and economical outcomes and pays attention to the benefits of HRM for employees, organizations, and society at large (Barrena-Martínez *et al.* 2017; De Prins *et al.* 2014; Ehnert *et al.* 2016; Kramar, 2014). Thereby, it takes a more balanced view of different stakeholders than strategic HRM (De Vos and van der Heijden, 2017; Järlström *et al.* 2018; Kramar, 2014). Thus, sustainable HRM can be considered an umbrella concept which covers all three dimensions of sustainability: economic, social and environmental sustainability (Paulet *et al.* 2021).

Compared to sustainable HRM, GHRM concentrates on the environmental aspect of the triple bottom line (see, e.g., De Prins *et al.* 2014; Gehrels and Suleri, 2016) and promotes the environmental strategy of a firm (Zhao *et al.* 2020). GHRM practices can, in the long run, benefit the organizations financially by reducing, for example, electricity and water supply costs (Steg and Vlek, 2009), as well as socially by improving employees' well-being (Venhoeven *et al.* 2013). GHRM is a relatively new concept within the academic context and researchers have debated on how it should be defined (Ahmad, 2015; Dumont *et al.* 2017; Mtembu, 2019). However, certain common characteristics regarding different GHRM definitions have been found. For example, GHRM is considered a means to achieve environmental sustainability (Kramar, 2014; Ren *et al.* 2017) by greening business processes and making pro-environmental changes in an organization (Ahmad, 2015; Dumont *et al.* 2017; Kim *et al.* 2019). Thus, GHRM is "essential for successful implementation of green strategies and environmental management practices", as noted by Ren *et al.* (2018, p. 770).

In practice, GHRM covers all functional activities of HRM and thereby influences employees throughout their careers (Amrutha and Geetha, 2020). GHRM practices include green recruitment and selection, green training, green performance management, green rewarding, and green involvement (Zhao *et al.* 2020; Amrutha and Geetha, 2020). For example, organizations enable achieving their environmental objectives in the long run, if they can attract and recruit employees with green values (Paille *et al.* 2014). Furthermore, GHRM allows integrating green values and goals into HRM that further support firms' environmental strategy and the achievement of increased environmental performance (Zhao *et al.* 2020; Amrutha and Geetha, 2020).

For organizations, GHRM acts as a tool to promote organization-level environmental strategy through the active involvement of employees (Amrutha and Geetha, 2020; Saeed *et al.* 2018; Kim *et al.* 2019). One example of the organizational-level outcome of GHRM is an environmental reputation, which illustrates the company's environmental credibility and is further connected with the company's competitiveness in the long run (Zhao *et al.* 2020). Another potential result of GHRM is strengthening a sustainable employer brand (Saeed *et al.* 2018). Previous studies have also argued that employees' active participation in green activities can increase organizations' environmental performance (Safari *et al.* 2017). In addition to environmental performance aspects, GHRM practices can improve and strengthen employee-employer relationships (Saeed *et al.* 2018).

2.2. GHRM and employees' voluntary pro-environmental behavior

GHRM targets influencing employees' pro-environmental attitudes and behavior (Kim *et al.* 2019; Shen *et al.* 2018). Thus, GHRM practices are seen as a means to strengthen employees' engagement in pro-environmental activities in the workplace and improve their skills, knowledge, and abilities in terms of green issues (Zhao *et al.* 2020). Employees' pro-environmental behavior refers to "scalable actions and behaviors that employees engage in that are linked with and contribute to or detract from environmental sustainability" (Ones and Dilchert, 2012, p. 452).

Employees' pro-environmental or green behavior can include both compulsory and voluntary elements (Hameed *et al.* 2020). The former refers to so-called in-role behavior, whereas the latter relates to voluntary, extra-role behavior, which goes beyond employees' formal job-tasks (Chen *et al.* 2021). In practice, employees' pro-environmental behavior at work may include, for example, recycling, sustainable ways of working such as water- and energy-saving and conserving resources, influencing others, taking initiative in green issues, and avoiding harm to nature (Hameed *et al.* 2020; Norton *et al.* 2005; see e.g. Ones and Dilchert, 2012). The connection between GHRM practices and employees' pro-environmental behavior has been explained by using different theoretical frameworks such as the AMO theory (Chen *et al.* 2021; Pham *et al.* 2019; Shen *et al.* 2018), the social exchange theory (Pham *et al.* 2019; Ahmad and Umrani, 2019), and the social identity theory (Shen *et al.* 2018).

According to the AMO theory, GHRM practices influence employees' environmental awareness and green skills, increase their motivation towards environmental issues, and provide opportunities to promote green initiatives in the organization (Shen *et al.* 2018). For example, providing employees with training about environmental problems increases awareness among employees about sustainability issues, which in turn can increase pro-environmental behavior among employees (Safari *et al.* 2017; Renwick *et al.* 2016; Pinzone *et al.* 2016; Mtembu, 2019).

The social exchange theory, on the other hand, focuses on interpersonal relations and aims to explain the reciprocal employer-employee relationship and how employers' favorable treatment of employees is related to their attitudes and behavior (Ahmad and Umrani, 2019). In the context of GHRM, this means that if employees feel that they will benefit from the organizational actions and policies, they are more likely to reciprocate with a corresponding behavior (Pham *et al.* 2019). The social identity theory, in turn, postulates that when GHRM practices and values are socially recognized and approved, employees can adjust their behavior towards greener goals (Young *et al.* 2015; Shen *et al.* 2018).

Although previous GHRM studies have investigated the influence of GHRM on employees' pro-environmental behavior, less attention has been given to employees' active involvement and voluntary green initiatives in the organizational context (Boiral, 2009; Pham *et al.* 2019). In the field of organizational psychology, employees' voluntary pro-environmental behavior has been studied extensively in recent years and diverse models of antecedents and outcomes of employees' voluntary pro-environmental behavior have been presented (see e.g. Norton *et al.* 2015; Kim *et al.* 2017). It has also been acknowledged that employees' voluntary pro-environmental behavior can be a result of both top-down and bottom-up processes in organizations (Pinzone *et al.* 2016). Still, the development of an organization's GHRM practices as a result of employees' voluntary pro-environmental behavior has been largely overlooked. Furthermore, empirical studies on GHRM and employees' pro-environmental behavior have been mainly conducted in European countries due to strict government rules and regulations regarding waste management and environmental protection in those countries (Amrutha and Geetha, 2020). Thus, there is a need to investigate employees' perceptions regarding GHRM practices and their voluntary pro-environmental behavior in diverse regulatory environments and settings, such as in Russia (see, e.g., Graves *et al.* 2019).

3. Materials and methods

To explore how employees perceive their employer organization's GHRM practices and describe their voluntary pro-environmental behavior within the organization, this study adopted a qualitative case research methodology (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2016). The primary data for the study is comprised of 11 office employee interviews from three Russian case companies that were generated during October and November 2019. Two of these companies (Companies A and B) operate in the information technology (IT) sector, whereas the third one is a multinational food and beverage producing company. At the time of conducting the interviews, company A employed a total of 450 employees, and all its personnel and operations were located in the Moscow office. Company B employed approximately 1,700 employees of which 850 were working in the Moscow office. Company C had approximately 20,000 employees around Russia of which 850 worked in the central office located in Moscow. All the interviewed employees worked in the case

companies' offices located in Moscow business centers and the office spaces were designed in line with an open concept. Therefore, the similar location of the companies' offices, physical arrangements, and employees' office work created a similar environment and socio-cultural context for examining the employees' perceptions about their employers' GHRM practices and their pro-environmental behavior in their employer organizations.

The data generation process started by contacting HR managers of the companies. The HR managers helped the first author of this article to identify employees that could be further approached. The interviews were organized around five key themes as follows: a) green initiatives and activities taking place in one's organization, b) personal perceptions and feelings about them, c) perceptions about the managers' role in these activities, d) communicating green initiatives, and e) activities with colleagues. All interviews were conducted in Russian by phone and recorded. Most of the interviewees were female office workers. The length of the interviews varied from 17 to 34 minutes.

The secondary data utilized in the study concerned the companies' websites, corporate social media, annual reports published by companies, as well as scientific publications, media, and the official results of public opinion polls. The secondary data was utilized in describing the context as well as in contextualizing case companies' roles in promoting sustainable practices in that context.

A qualitative content analysis (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2016) was chosen as the method for data analysis. In the qualitative content analysis, the focus is on the content or contextual meaning of the textual data (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). Systematic classification and coding processes through which different themes and patterns are identified are typical for this method (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). In this study, the analyzing and interpretation processes started already during the transcription of the interviews, followed by a more careful reading during which interesting and peculiar issues were marked by using colored pens. This open coding phase (see .e.g. Elo and Kyngäs, 2007) included both concept- and data-driven elements. As a result of this phase, a preliminary sheet for key codes was produced. The process continued with merging similar codes with one another. Finally, the analysis and interpretation process resulted a categorization of three different GHRM approaches evident in the studied companies.

4. Findings

The analysis resulted in the identification of three approaches to GHRM in the studied companies: 1) an unofficial, bottom-up approach, 2) an official GHRM approach, and 3) a strategic GHRM approach. Next, we will elaborate on these approaches and their contents.

4.1. Unofficial, bottom-up GHRM approach

Case company A was a Russian online travel agency. Its main product was a website where customers can check train, bus, and plane schedules, buy tickets, and find and book hotels, as well as whole travel tours. Based on the analysis, this company had no identifiable official GHRM practices. However, there was a group of active volunteer employees who had launched diverse green initiatives. These initiatives had started to emerge a few years ago when the company relocated. Recycling was one example of the bottom-up initiatives introduced by the employees, as illustrated in the following data excerpt:

It was one person who cared that plastic pollutes nature, the second one – me. At some point, we discussed it and decided that it would be great to make some collection points for the whole company. We thought that since we are an IT company, the problem of paper consumption is not that essential. But everyone drinks bottled water. (Interviewee 1)

Interestingly, the group of volunteers in the company invested their own money to buy containers for plastic bottles. During their free time, once a month, the employees drove to the municipal recycling points to empty the containers:

The guys (the active employees) do not mind spending a little more gasoline and making a small detour on the way home to put the plastic into a special municipal container. (Interviewee 1)

These initiatives were, thus, first developed and put into practice by a group of employees. Then, they were introduced to the whole company in weekly general meetings and via online channels such as e-mails and messenger apps. As a result of these bottom-up actions, some of the green practices had been gradually integrated to be a part of the firm's official HR practices. For instance, the green practices were introduced to newly hired employees by the firm's HR specialists. In this way, the grassroots green actions were gradually rooted as part of the official HR practices.

In addition to existing green practices, the group of volunteer employees actively developed new green initiatives at their workplace. Their main motivation was doing good for their community. Although the top managers of the company appreciated the employees' efforts to put forward green practices, they were not ready to financially support these practices. For instance, only a specific place in the office for recycling containers was designated by the managers:

When the volunteers asked for support for the green initiatives [...] none of the managers said "let's do it". Instead, they said that they were not ready to spend time, money, and resources on this. Now, we are negotiating with the managers that the bottles could be disposed of at the expense of the company. We hope this will lead to something. (Interviewee 2)

Due to the lack of official organizational support for green practices, the promotion of green practices was mainly dependent on the voluntary behavior and active involvement of employees. Consequently, the current green practices lacked a long-term strategic focus:

There are really no processes within the company, there is only a process based on the desire of those who want to do this. For now, it somehow works. (Interviewee 2)

It can be concluded that in the Company A case, an unofficial, bottom-up GHRM approach was evident. The green practices were mainly launched because of the voluntary behavior of active employees. Thus, it seems that to some extent green practices in an organization can emerge without managerial involvement. However, due to the lack of top managers' support and organizational resources, the development and scaling up of those green practices is difficult. Furthermore, limited managerial interest in GHRM practices may inhibit less active employees' pro-environmental behavior, which supports the argument about the importance of top management engagement in the development of GHRM (see, e.g., Kramar, 2014).

4.2. Official GHRM approach

Company B was a large online platform company, specialized in web-based advertisements. In this company, taking care of the environment was written down in the company's mission. Compared to Company A, a more proactive approach towards environmental issues was adopted in Company B. For instance, the company's first green initiative was launched by the management team. This initiative concerned the creation of a green office. To do that, the best practices were adopted from other companies as illustrated in the following data excerpt:

Colleagues from the administrative service department communicated with colleagues from other companies that had green offices. As part of the exchange of experiences, this [green office] has come to us, and most of the current [green] practices are from there [borrowed from other companies]. (Interviewee 3)

As a result of the benchmarking process, several green practices were introduced in the company, including a space for separate waste collection, a container for unnecessary clothes, a box for plastic bottle caps, and a person in charge of taking care of emptying the containers. One

of the reasons behind the company's green initiatives and practices was that its office was located in a business center that was actively promoting environmental office-space solutions.

Two or three years ago, our company participated in 'an experience exchange'. Our employees collaborated with colleagues from other sustainable offices, discussed the best initiatives, and shared experience of their implementation. I would say that the participation in it was largely motivated by the fact that successful, breakthrough companies introduce this approach and openly talk about it. Our company decided that it would be nice to do the same. (Interviewee 4)

In addition to waste handling issues, the company had also paid attention to reducing the volume of waste, for example, by developing its electronic document management system as illustrated in the following data excerpt:

...If users (business partners) are connected to electronic systems, and there are more and more of them, we will switch to the electronic exchange of closing documents with them. This reduces paper consumption. In general, like the whole country, we are waiting for the transition to an electronic system in terms of labor legislation. (Interviewee 6)

As a part of the familiarization process for new employees, office tours were arranged to introduce the green activities of the company. However, the interviewed employees perceived that high turnover mitigated employee engagement with green activities as illustrated in the following data excerpt:

The company has a large employee turnover. This is typical for large companies. New employees do not always pay attention to recycling facilities, and in Russia, the culture of separate waste collection is not so well-developed. Even if there are opportunities [for recycling], people do not always use them. (Interviewee 3)

For communicating the green initiatives and practices, the company's online channels were used, and once a month a newsletter was sent to employees to remind them about the current green initiatives. However, the top managers did not actively communicate these issues. Instead, the administrative department handled the communication. Employees were also encouraged to suggest new green initiatives or provide ideas on how to improve the current, environmentally friendly activities of the company as illustrated in the following data quotation:

We have many online communication channels through which employees can talk about their ideas such as e-mail and Slack... They [employees] can just come to our [HR] office or talk about it. (Interviewee 5)

According to our data analysis, the interviewed employees perceived that most of the employees had positive attitudes towards green initiatives and practices. Yet, only a small group of employees were actively involved in the green initiatives. Examples of the employee-led sustainability actions inside the company were, for example, a battery collection project, removal of plastic straws and lids for cups, and relinquishing disposable tableware. Meanwhile, charity trips to orphanages and animal shelters, tree planting campaigns, and forest and park cleans were examples of external sustainability activities initiated by the employees. For the employees, participation in these green activities was completely voluntary.

An important motivator for pro-environmental behavior among the interviewed employees, according to our analysis, was the awareness of the global environmental challenges and the desire to act in environmentally friendly ways. For them, green practices were seen to cover all aspects of personal life, not only the work domain. Some skepticism still existed among the interviewees, especially in terms of how actively environmental issues were promoted in their society. For example, distrust towards the communal recycling system was perceived to discourage employees' pro-environmental behavior as illustrated in the following data excerpt:

There are degrees of mistrust since there are not many waste processing plants in Russia. In the previous workplace, I saw the following: in the office, the guys separated garbage, and the cleaning service company dumped all [garbage] into one bag. Thus, distrust is present [among employees to recycling facilities]. (Interviewee 4)

To summarize, the existing official GHRM practices in Company B were mainly a result of the benchmarking process. However, we also observed that green activities were created based on employee-led initiatives. Although employees' voluntary behavior and active involvement were valued in the company, a lack of top management engagement in GHRM was evident.

4.3. Strategic GHRM approach

Company C was a multinational beverage and food producer which has a subsidiary in Russia. Due to the international nature of the company, the Russian subsidiary followed international norms, values, and codes of conduct. Environmental concerns and sustainability values were included in the company's strategy on a corporate level and supported by official policies, instructions, and environmental goals. Furthermore, green aspects were also incorporated in the organizational culture and activities at all levels, such as company reports, events, conferences, and presentations. Consequently, employees were aware of the environmental goals of the company as illustrated in the following data quotation:

Who, if not corporations, can influence the ecological situation. We are the ones who produce this plastic, and we are trying to reduce the impact. The global goal is to make packaging fully recyclable by 2025. We are a big business with great resources, so we can do it. (Interviewee 10)

The company utilized the same sustainable principles and practices in its production site and office. Although the office had a rather small ecological footprint in the scope of all the activities of the company, GHRM practices were widely implemented there. For example, the office space, where the interviewees worked, was equipped with water and energy-saving technologies and sustainable materials.

We have a very large organization and many production sites. And one of our key priorities is responsible production and a responsible attitude towards business. We have a large place in the range of treatment facilities at plants, water treatment in particular. That is, we have a water cycle, we do not consume water from the outside. If we talk about emissions, they are minimized. Modern systems are installed in all factories. Also, at all factories - and in the office - there is a separate waste collection system. (Interviewee 8)

In the company's office, the current waste recycling infrastructure included several collecting points on every floor. Recently, this infrastructure was supplemented with an initiative to voluntarily refuse a personal trash bin. Interestingly, the interviewed employees seemed to trust the company more than the municipal recycling system. For example, some of the respondents noted that they used recycling facilities more actively in the office than at home, and they even sometimes brought waste from home to the company's recycling points.

I do not recycle waste at home, but I recycle at work. I trust the company. It [Company C] is very supportive in terms of green values, I think they handle waste properly [...] I have seen other people putting their mixed waste in random bins, so it is not really recyclable materials anymore. Maybe I believe in a municipal system itself, but I do not believe in people who use it. (Interviewee 10)

In terms of GHRM practices, Company C used, for example, green training to increase employees' environmental awareness. Also, the company held lectures and seminars about

sustainability topics, and regularly updated the materials on the Intranet. Employees' attention regarding pro-environmental issues was attracted by using posters. One of the recent organization-lead green initiatives, supported with posters, was to abandon disposable cups in the entire office, as demonstrated in the following data excerpt:

On the posters, it was indicated that on average each employee spends eight cups per day, and this is about 1920 cups a year. It makes you think about your own habits and behavior. (Interviewee 11)

The official, organization-led GHRM practices were complemented with employee-led green initiatives. For example, an active group of employees had suggested avoiding non-recyclable, vinyl banners in the company's events. Based on this initiative, vinyl banners were replaced by paintable walls at company events. The interviewed employees highlighted that their pro-environmental behavior was strengthened by the company's green practices and pro-environmental corporate culture. Yet, employees' participation in green activities was voluntary. The data excerpt below illustrates this observation:

Participation is entirely voluntary, but many employees are involved in green initiatives. Organically, there is an initiative group that is happy to support this... I have heard that there are only few people who does not want to take part in the initiatives [...] But there is nothing againts green initiatives, practices, and values [among employees]. (Interviewee 8)

The managerial team of the company communicated actively to all employees about the importance of environmental matters, which reflects green leadership. Both Russian and international top managers also regularly published informative videos on the Intranet and used email newsletters to reach the employees. In the videos, they talked, for example, about respect for the environment and the importance of a separate collection of garbage. According to the interviewed employees, the managers use also e-mail and newsletters to highlight the importance of environmental issues and to encourage employees to think about green issues.

When "people from the above" talk about some problems, you start to take those problems a bit more seriously. (Interviewee 10)

Taken together, the strategic approach to GHRM of Company C, according to our data analysis, resulted from international official GHRM practices as well as local initiatives. The active involvement of the top management strengthened the pro-environmental organizational culture and the promotion of green values within the company. Therefore, systematically used GHRM practices promoted employees' pro-environmental attitudes and encouraged towards green behavior in the company.

5. Discussion

The promotion of sustainability has gained popularity in the field of HRM (Mariappanadar, 2019), emphasizing HRM's crucial role in encouraging the development of social and environmental aspects in organizations in parallel with economic goals (Kramar, 2014). Although interest towards GHRM has increased significantly and several positive outcomes have been associated with the implementation of GHRM practices (Renwick et al. 2016; Ren et al. 2018; Saeed et al. 2018), less attention has been given to employees' voluntary pro-environmental behavior in promoting green practices (Boiral, 2009) and the development of GHRM in organizations.

Our study contributes to the GHRM literature by focusing on the promotion of GHRM as a result of employees' pro-environmental behavior. Drawing analytical insights from literature and conducting qualitative case studies among employees working in three different companies located in the Moscow metropolitan area, the study identifies three different GHRM approaches: 1) unofficial, bottom-up GHRM approach, 2) official GHRM approach, and 3) strategic GHRM approach.

In line with the study of Pinzone *et al.* (2016), we identified both bottom-up and top-down approaches in the promotion of environmental sustainability in the studied companies. For instance, there were differences in terms of whether recycling was initiated by the employees or by the company. In Company A, the interviewed employees perceived GHRM practices as almost non-existent, and green initiatives were mainly introduced by an active group of employees. The lack of managerial support for green initiatives in Company A resonates with a passive-avoidant, so-called laissez-faire environmental leadership identified in the study of Graves *et al.* (2019). In company B, the interviewed employees perceived that the official GHRM practices were mostly copied from other companies. Whereas in Company C, GHRM practices were perceived by the interviewed employees as strategic and as an integral part of the company's actions. Thus, in Company C, the green initiatives mainly resulted from the company's pro-environmental strategy and culture as well as the active involvement of the company's top management.

Interestingly, GHRM practices in all case companies were heavily related to recycling, whereas other green practices, such as reducing the use of materials or consumption (see, e.g. Ahmad, 2015), were largely missing – especially in the cases of companies A and B. There is some evidence that the GHRM practices in many Russian companies are still rather fragmented (Arzamasova and Esaulova, 2020), but at the same time, companies' annual reports demonstrate that great importance is placed on HRM practices to achieve environmental results and to increase environmental sustainability (Arzamasova and Esaulova, 2020). Thus, it can be concluded that GHRM is starting to receive more attention in Russian companies (Arzamasova and Cherepanov, 2020).

The focus on waste recycling in all the studied companies can be explained by the specific nature of the office environment: waste is the most noticeable aspect in this context and recycling can be considered an applicable practice in the office space. Interestingly, there existed mistrust among the interviewees regarding the municipal recycling system as well as the individuals using this system. Especially in Company A and Company B, there was mistrust among employees towards the overall recycling system that can be due to the forming stage of pro-environmental culture in Russia (Safonov *et al.* 2013). Similarly, Graves *et al.* (2019) have argued that Russian companies currently have only a few incentives from public authorities to actively address environmental issues.

In Company C case, the level of trust in the company's recycling facilities was high among the interviewed employees. This can be explained by the fact that Company C was a multinational firm with unified HRM practices and policies in different subsidiaries and, consequently, had more developed GHRM practices compared to other companies. This finding provides support for Pham *et al.*'s study (2019), which demonstrated that the culture and values of the companies' headquarters influenced subsidiaries' GHRM practices.

Our study also demonstrated that along with official, organization-led GHRM practices, employees' active voluntary pro-environmental behavior contributed to the development of GHRM practices. The importance of employees' active involvement and voluntary pro-environmental behavior was particularly noticeable in Company A, which lacked the top management support for GHRM practices. Thus, in line with the study of Graves *et al.* (2019), our findings stress the importance of employees' active involvement and inner motivation for pro-environmental behavior in the organizational context. Based on our findings, we argue that the relationship between GHRM practices and employees' pro-environmental behavior is not unidirectional as suggested in previous studies (Shen *et al.* 2018). For example, Mtembu (2019) has demonstrated that HR managers rarely consider themselves as actors for promoting green initiatives. Similarly, our findings stress the crucial role of managerial participation in implementing GHRM practices and enhancing pro-environmental behavior within the organization. Our study shows that active top management involvement supports employees' pro-environmental behavior, whereas passive managerial involvement discourages employees' pro-environmental behavior. These findings are in line with the study of Kramar (2014) and Renwick *et al.* (2016), and Yusliza *et al.* (2019), who have stressed the importance of managerial participation in developing green organizational practices.

Based on our study, we also argue that employees' voluntary pro-environmental behavior and active involvement have an important role when GHRM practices are in a formative stage in

an organization. In this case, employees can actively facilitate the development of green organizational practices (Saeed *et al.* 2013). However, official GHRM practices together with management support and organizational facilities are needed to create a convenient context that can support employees' pro-environmental behavior (see, e.g. Norton *et al.* 2015; Young *et al.* 2015).

5.1. Practical implications

Our study provides several practical implications. First, organizations should identify their green-minded employees and capitalize their full potential for developing organizational green practices. Official, top-down GHRM practices are, however, needed along with the voluntary pro-environmental behavior of employees. Second, when a company is moving towards "a green path", adopting various GHRM practices from other (leading) companies may provide a suitable starting point. Third, if a company is targeting to develop its activities towards a more strategic GHRM, we recommend that they would actively engage employees in these efforts in all levels of the company. Furthermore, the role of top managers is vital, because they act as role models for the adoption of green practices and foster the creation of pro-environmental organizational culture. Finally, the larger societal context in which the companies operate may hinder or facilitate the development of GHRM practices and policies. For example, in our case study, the general mistrust towards municipal recycling systems was identified as a barrier to employees' recycling activism. Thus, the active involvement and guidance of municipal actors are also needed to strengthen green practices among employees and companies.

5.2. Limitations and suggestions for future research

Despite addressing a novel approach to GHRM, there are some limitations in this study, which provide paths for future research. First, the theoretical framework of this study was based on the GHRM and employees' pro-environmental behavior perspectives. In future studies, the GHRM perspective could be combined with larger theoretical discussions, such as sustainable HRM (Järlström *et al.* 2018), environmental management, and corporate social responsibility (see, e.g. De Prins *et al.* 2014). Additionally, by applying an institutional theory (Pham *et al.* 2019), future GHRM studies could also more thoroughly examine the wider societal context in which companies develop their GHRM practices. Second, the interview data generated for this study was collected from white-collar (mostly female) employees working in three companies located in the Moscow metropolitan area, which limits the generalizability of the results. Future studies could collect data from other Russian companies and include a more balanced gender representation of employees to verify our findings. Third, as our data analysis focused on the employee-level, a multi-level analysis could provide a more nuanced and refined understanding of the current state of GHRM. Furthermore, a longitudinal study design could enable the investigation of the mechanisms between GHRM and individual employees' pro-environmental behavior. Fourth, we collected the interview data before the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. These events have likely shaped the business environment of many companies and therefore there is a need to investigate the promotion of sustainability in the context of the changed business landscape. Finally, most of the previous empirical studies on GHRM have been conducted in European and Asian countries (see, e.g. Pinzone *et al.* 2016; Shen *et al.* 2018). Thus, future studies should widen the scope to other geographical areas and also to conduct comparative studies that allow the investigation of diverse GHRM approaches in different countries.

6. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that employees' voluntary pro-environmental behavior facilitates the environmental sustainability actions in organizations even in situations when there is a lack of official GHRM practices. To develop the strategic GHRM, both top management support and the voluntary pro-environmental behavior of employees are needed. Cultural and broader societal context should also be seen as important factors that can encourage or discourage employees'

pro-environmental behavior and the implementation of GHRM practices in organizations. This study contributes to current GHRM literature by analyzing and discussing the current state of GHRM in the Russian context. Particularly, the Russian context is characterized by the lack of environmental consciousness and the lack of trust in the official environmental and waste management systems, such as the local recycling system that can act as barriers for employees' pro-environmental behavior and the development of GHRM practices in organizations.

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