Managing Human Resources for Environmental Sustainability

A Publication of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology
Managing Human Resources for Environmental Sustainability

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Rarely are there new developments that are true “game-changers” in the fields of I-O psychology and human resource management; perhaps no more than one in a decade. But the topic of this book, making organizations “green,” tells us about one of those rare changes that is unfolding right now. Nothing could be more useful to practitioners and researchers in HRM, in I-O, and organization development than a solid understanding of this shift, as delivered in this book.

The topic, how to conduct organizational operations in ways that are environmentally friendly and sustainable, may still be new to most professionals in these fields. Its growth and development is so fresh in ideas and so powerful that it may be described as a hugely innovative, even revolutionary movement. This new way of thinking and acting marks an enormous sea change in how we deal with many issues that affect our lives daily at work and in the long term as well.

**A Slow Revolution**

In scope and impact, it reminds me of the U.S. Civil Rights movement in the 1960s, which seemed so extraordinary at the time. I recall that “before and after” vividly, as I began my professional life about then. The “before” included an Army stint in the state of Georgia. While Army life in Fort Benning was not structured by race, just outside the gates there was a stark and distasteful view of a racially segregated nation. Public accommodations, such as restaurants and hotels, were kept separately for so-called white and colored. So too were schools and even the restrooms in gasoline stations. It seems hard to imagine all that now.
When Civil Rights laws took effect in the mid-1960s, the “after” included huge changes in our employment practices. How we recruited, selected, trained, and rewarded employees were forever changed. Today we take for granted many practices that began to change then. (As one small example, no longer do we find “Help Wanted” notices split into “Male” and “Female” sections.)

In the coming decades, I believe we will look back at the current era as the start of one of those rare historic shifts that has major long-lasting impacts on our field. That shift is the recognition and relevance of environmental sustainability. I believe this book will be seen as a watershed event, and its content will be a touchstone for many practitioners.

Of particular interest is the diverse genesis of this movement. It is impelled by assorted sources, not just legislative, and many of them are just out of sight to everyday observers. As Susan Jackson writes in her introductory chapter, “Portrait of a Slow Revolution Toward Environmental Sustainability,” several forces have been building over the last few decades.

There has been the attention given to disastrous trends and events in air and water pollution and nuclear accidents. The impact of global climate change has also made headlines. The United Nations’ efforts and the Kyoto protocol of 1997, now ratified by 197 nations, have involved many governments. In the meantime, several international agencies have developed standards to measure and report environmental performance, and some of these standards are now being used by leading companies.

Providing Useful Tools

Our troika of editors, Susan Jackson, Deniz Ones, and Stephan Dilchert, are pioneers in their research, understanding, and writing about this new field of environmental sustainability in organizations. Their research is the product of innovative and clear thinking. Best of all, their writing is lucid, engaging, and trail-blazing.

For example, Deniz Ones and Stephan Dilchert provide us in one chapter with an original and data-based taxonomy of employee green behaviors. This model of the types of employee
actions that contribute to environmental sustainability can help practitioners to think conceptually about just what employees do and can help in the measurement of such behaviors. They also expand their discussion of relevant tools in another chapter devoted to measuring environmental sustainability performance at the level of the employee, organization, or nation.

The choice of chapter contributors and use of case studies are especially valuable aspects of this volume. The chapter authors are knowledgeable and at the forefront of work in this field. For example, in one chapter we learn from the results of a recent survey of 728 human resource professionals just what their organizations are doing in green practices and how to recruit and socialize new employees, who are more apt to engage in appropriate environmental behaviors.

The chapter contributors also represent a global cast of researchers and practitioners in environmental sustainability. This is evident in the eight case studies that show how environmentally sustainable practices are being implemented in different organizations. The settings range from the U.S. to Uganda and Germany, and to the United Kingdom’s McDonald’s operation. It includes the case of Procter & Gamble’s global survey of employees’ green attitudes and behavior in eighty countries.

The environmental sustainability actions of many organizations may have once seemed merely public relations gestures or part of a morally commendable aspect of corporate social responsibility. Now such actions seem more likely to become an organizational way of life based on profit as well as principles of good governance, undergirded by law. As one contributor tells us, even the financial publisher Dow Jones has developed an environmental practices index to help assess green practices that “create shareholder value.”

As with many other environmental changes, those organizations that adapt the best and fastest will reap the greatest gains. Those firms will be able to select and train the most suitable people early, set desirable patterns of behavior, and take proper credit for it—which may be another way of saying that the needed changes will not be easy, but they are likely to be worthwhile.

In moving our fields forward, we should be most grateful to our editors, Susan, Deniz, and Stephan, for imagining and
producing this wonderful volume. We are indebted to them and to their outstanding set of chapter contributors. When this book was first proposed, the Professional Practice Series Editorial Board was enthusiastic and hopeful. The board’s endorsement has been amply repaid by the final product. I believe this volume richly deserves the long shelf life I predict for it.

Rye, New York

December 1, 2011

Allen I. Kraut, Series Editor
We were delighted when the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP) gave us the opportunity to prepare this edited volume on environmental sustainability in organizations. As concerns about environmental degradation are becoming increasingly salient in all domains of life, businesses face increasing pressure from their stakeholders—governments, shareholders, customers, and employees—to adopt environmentally friendly policies and practices. Organizational efforts in this domain, however, typically focus on strategic questions, technological contributions, public policy linkages, or marketing considerations. Yet, employees and other organizational members are pivotal to all organizational initiatives. This volume was created to draw our attention to the growing number of workforce issues that relate to environmental sustainability.

Increasingly, industrial and organizational (I-O) psychologists and human resources practitioners are interested in the topic of environmental sustainability. Starting in 2010, a large number of SIOP sessions on the topic have attracted sizeable audiences. The 2011 day-long Theme Track at the annual SIOP conference and the 2012 SIOP Leading Edge Consortium provided further evidence that our field has recognized environmental sustainability as an important topic of scientific inquiry and applied psychological practice. At the same time, universities are increasingly offering workshops, courses, and even majors on environmental sustainability. Discussions of environmental issues are being incorporated into existing I-O psychology and HRM courses. As greater numbers of companies continue to adopt environmental goals, employees have to contribute in various ways to make sustainability in organizations a reality. I-O psychologists who work in industry as well as HR managers need to—at the very least—familiarize themselves with the issues in this domain. Moreover, we believe
that “green” transformations of organizations are simply not possible without the involvement of I-O psychologists who will need to (re)define job requirements and design approaches to recruit, select, train, develop, manage, motivate, lead, and reward the future workforces of environmentally sustainable organizations.

This volume reflects diverse perspectives arising from the breadth of views and experiences represented. The contributing authors and organizations are international, from developed and emerging economies, spanning a variety of industries, and represent a mix of applied and academic backgrounds. The chapters and case studies aim to highlight the central role of employees, I-O psychologists, and human resource management in achieving environmental sustainability goals in applied organizational settings. In the field, many practitioners are already involved in the creation and implementation of initiatives with positive environmental impact. Yet, there is little empirical research, especially at the individual level of analysis, in our academic journals that documents and examines the green revolution transforming workforces and workplaces globally. This is an area in which practice is leading research.

Editing this volume was a rewarding experience for us, as it provided the opportunity to observe an evolving area within our profession and learn from the contributing authors. We are thankful for the support of several individuals. Allen Kraut, the SIOP Practice Series editor, was a strong advocate from the very beginning. His understanding of the strategic importance of HR in achieving environmental sustainability was much appreciated. Eduardo Salas, president of SIOP when this book was initiated, was also unwavering in his support of this project and related endeavors (the 2011 Theme Track and 2012 Leading Edge Consortium). Finally, we appreciated the support we received from our colleagues and students at Rutgers University, Baruch College, and the University of Minnesota.

We look forward to this book spurring future HR practice and psychological research on environmental sustainability in work settings.

December 2011

Deniz S. Ones
Stephan Dilchert
Susan E. Jackson
The Editors

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