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## Green human resource management: a comparative qualitative case study of a United States multinational corporation

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This article explores the ways in which a multinational company approaches green human resource management (HRM) in its British, German and Swedish subsidiaries. The authors analyse the similarities and differences in Green HRM approaches in these three European subsidiaries of a US restaurant chain. This enables the comparison of Green HRM practices and behaviours, and considers the factors that influence the subsidiaries in this particular domain. Therefore, this research addresses the current lack of international comparative research in the field of Green HRM. The methodological approach is a multi-case study with 50 participants, using semi-structured interviews and focus groups. The results present evidence of proactive environmental management, reflected through a range of operational and people-centred initiatives across the three European countries. Although there is an overarching commitment to environmental sustainability, the positioning and alignment of the environment and HR function differ amongst the subsidiaries, as does the way in which the subsidiaries choose to engage the workforce in environmental sustainability. The study identified a number of factors that explain the differences in approaches including, amongst others, strategic and performance drivers and cultural dimensions, such as relationships with key stakeholders.

**Keywords:** employee engagement; environmental sustainability; Germany; green human resource management; human resource management; Sweden; United Kingdom

### Introduction

The degree to which human resource management (HRM) practices, systems, policies and activities align with environmental management is a growing area of research. For example, according to Jabbour (2013a, pp. 147–148), Green HRM is concerned with the ‘systemic, planned alignment of typical human resource management practices with the organizations environmental goals’. This requires the alignment between HR and other functional areas of the organization. Recent studies have suggested that, due to the emerging business case for green environmental management (Ambec & Lanoie, 2008), the positioning of the ‘greening’ function plays a key role in improving the environmental performance of organizations. The attention organizations wish to give to green issues is reflected in the extent of the integration of a company’s corporate Green HRM strategy into its performance management system (Marcus & Fremeth, 2009).

Incorporating green management into the everyday language and fabric of the organization is a growing phenomenon, fuelled by the realization that green credentials matter and opportunities for competitive advantage through innovative methods and design are feasible (Russo & Fouts, 1997; Shrivastava, 1995). The setting out of strategic priorities and objectives develops the ‘content’, the shift then needs to be made from

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content to ‘process’ which identifies the ways in which alignment between the overarching strategy and Green HRM strategic priorities can be achieved (Jackson & Seo, 2010). In addition, where firms are committed to greening their operations and embedding these clearly in their mission statements and strategies, the organizationally committed employee would be more inclined to work in a congruent and environmentally sound manner (Harvey, Williams, & Probert, 2013). Therefore, the positioning and alignment of the environment and HR function is essential to achieving environmental performance that seeks to translate strategy into operational practice. The engagement and commitment of employees is another key dimension in embedding Green practices in organizations (Aragon-Correa, Martin-Tapia, & Hurtado-Torres, 2013; Renwick, Redman, & Maguire, 2013). Consequently, this study will focus on these areas of Green HRM.

This study examines an organization within the foodservice industry and draws a comparison between three European countries, the UK, Sweden and Germany. First, as multinational companies (MNCs) seek to develop environmental management across varying national settings, the degree to which MNCs adopt a consistent approach to Green HRM across countries is unclear. This research focuses on three country subsidiaries of an MNC, identifying specific strategic, operational and cultural dimensions associated with environmental sustainability. It offers insight into the rationale and stakeholder perceptions of the positioning and alignment of the environment and HR function across these three European subsidiaries. By comparison, recent research focuses on organizations in the same national context (Chen & Chang, 2013; Hofer, Cantor, & Dai, 2012; Jabbour, Santos, & Nagano, 2010, 2012; Jabbour, 2013b; Paillé, Chen, Boiral, & Jin, 2014; Tatoglu, Bayraktar, Sahadev, Demirbag, & Glaister, 2014; Teixeira, Jabbour, & Jabbour, 2012), but do not explicitly examine international differences, whereas this study specifically highlights international management practices with a particular focus on Green HRM.

Second, this research adds qualitative evidence to identify and explain the relationship between the environment and HR functions and the employee engagement practices. This involves identification and exploration of the practices involved in engaging the workforce in environmental sustainability. Thus far, research is primarily conceptual, with the development of concepts and theoretical propositions or, empirical utilizing quantitative methods of data collection and analysis (Chen & Chang, 2013; Jabbour, Jugend, Jabbour, Gunasekaran, & Latan, 2015; Jabbour et al., 2012; Jabbour, 2013b; Paillé et al., 2014, Tatoglu et al., 2014).

Third, this research focuses on the food service industry. This is important when considering the potential environmental impact, including energy consumption, waste and carbon footprint, as this industry is accused of producing extensive wastage and a high carbon footprint. Current research focuses on manufacturing industries and ISO 14001-certified companies (Jabbour et al., 2012, 2015; Teixeira et al., 2012) and aviation (Harvey et al., 2013). Therefore, this comparative qualitative empirical study seeks to address these identified gaps in the literature.

We begin by outlining the key themes associated with the positioning and alignment of the environment function and HR and, the development of employee engagement strategies and practices in this domain. We then describe our case study organization and outline our methods. Then, we present and discuss our findings before drawing conclusions, outlining limitations, potential for future research and implications for practice.

## **Green HRM**

Research in the field of Green HRM is inter-disciplinary, drawing from organizational themes within strategic management (Aragón-Correa & Rubio-López, 2007; Boiral, 2009; Jabbour et al., 2010; Schroeder, 2012), organizational performance and performance management (Clemens, 2006; Jabbour et al., 2015; Lämsiluoto & Jarvenpää, 2010; Marcus & Fremeth, 2009; Ambec & Lanoie, 2008), organizational culture, employee engagement, staff development and training (Govindarajulu & Daily, 2004; Jabbour 2013b; Rothenberg, 2003; Vaccaro & Echeverri, 2010). The following literature review focuses on the two prominent areas in the Green HRM debate as identified earlier in this study: the positioning and alignment of the environment and HR function including the integration with organizational performance and Green employee engagement.

### ***Positioning and alignment of the environmental and HR function***

The HR function has a critical role to play in creating and implementing sustainable business strategies throughout the organization (Cohen, Taylor, & Muller-Camen, 2012). However, the readiness on the part of HR to champion sustainability at a strategic level may be lacking, as HR managers may not see themselves as strategic drivers of environmental and sustainability initiatives; instead, they mainly see themselves as ideal partners to communicate the values to encourage behavioural change once strategy had been developed outside of HR. The positioning of the 'greening' function and its alignment to the corporate strategy and organizational performance is the key to improving environmental sustainability in organizations. Cohen et al. (2012) suggest that organizations may come to realize the need for sustainability through different routes, for example, a value-based route may be driven by personal principles and passion of individuals, a strategic route may redesign the business model to position this function accordingly and a defensive route may introduce policies and practices to meet legal responsibilities.

The literature on the strategic positioning of the environmental function emphasizes the need for integration of knowledge that generates capacities and establishes a shared vision based on sustainability amongst the members of the organization. For example, Brio et al. (2007) suggested that strategic integration of environmental management influences the achievement of an environmental action-based competitive advantage in an organization. However, whilst organizations may be 'talking green', the level to which they may be 'acting green' may be questionable (Prasad & Elmes, 2005). Jabbour (2011) addresses the importance of considering the alignment of HR practices systematically in order to put workers in control of environmental management. He suggests that, if there is little formalization of the inclusion of environmental issues in traditional HR practices, this can affect performance in formation of teams, organizational culture and learning resulting in a negative cycle. Nevertheless, there is little agreement on the most appropriate functional area for positioning sustainability initiatives (Schroeder, 2012). Jabbour et al. (2010) empirical study of Brazilian companies established that firms varied greatly in the degree to which HRM activities were aligned with environmental management. They observed that even if firms were publically committed to environmental sustainability, some HRM practices such as job analysis, selection, performance management, training and reward appeared to be unaffected by environmental management efforts. They have identified the evolutionary stages of green management: reactive, preventative and proactive based on the different levels at which companies incorporate environmental issues into management practice. However,

companies that are able to align practices and HR dimensions with the objectives of environmental management and performance can be successful in the organizational journey towards environmental sustainability (Paillé et al., 2014). More recently, Jabbour et al. (2015) have found that dimensions such as organizational size, certification and stakeholder interests and pressures all influence green product development and, ultimately, company performance.

Overall, whilst the recent literature has alerted us to the strategic dimensions for environmental management within HR, the focus has been mainly at a theoretical level. Therefore, there is a need for new empirical studies, which may offer insights into the dynamics of role and positioning of the environmental and HR functions and their implications on strategic environmental management and performance. This is particularly relevant in the context of HRM systems of MNCs aiming to establish a proactive approach to environmental management across more than one operation and geographical boundary.

### *Green employee engagement*

The role and responsibility of the employee in the successful alignment and integration of Green activities into the strategic aims of the organization has to be considered. It has been suggested that engaging with employees in addressing environmental concerns is one of the most significant challenges facing organizations today and in the future (Frank, Finnegan, & Taylor, 2004). This might explain why employee involvement in the area of environmental management is well researched and grounded in theory (Renwick et al., 2013). Authors have identified the importance of employee involvement in the implementation of environmental strategies (Ramus & Steger, 2000). Why organizations choose to engage the workforce in environmental management is therefore well documented (Aragon-Correa et al., 2013; Brio et al., 2007, 2009). Employee involvement in environmental management has three foci: first, through tapping employees' tacit knowledge gained through their close links to the production process (Boiral, 2002); second, through engaging and empowering employees to make suggestions for environmental improvements (Govindarajulu & Daily, 2004) and, third, through developing culture in the workplace, which supports environmental improvement efforts. Empirical studies have identified a range of methods to engage the workforce in environmental management, including amongst others, team formation (Hanna, Rocky Newman, & Johnson, 2000; Robertson & Barling, 2013), employee training (Teixeira et al., 2012), developing green leadership (Egri & Herman, 2000; Robertson & Barling, 2013) and developing a supportive culture (Kitazawa & Sarkis, 2000; Stone, 2000).

Many commentators recommend the use of green teams to involve the workforce in green management practices (Jabbour, 2013b; Jabbour, 2011), which can be defined as a team of people who work together to solve environmental problems that can be used to generate ideas, resolve environmental management conflicts and foster environmental learning. Employee environmental training and increased awareness together with a heightened level of motivation make it possible for companies to improve their environmental performance. Training programmes tailored to addressing environmental concerns can involve a three-stage planning process (Fernández, Junquera, & Ordiz, 2012) beginning with establishing the need and rationale for the training, defining the training programme objectives and developing content that aligns with the corporate objectives. Similarly, Jackson, Renwick, Jabbour, and Muller-Camen (2011) identify three Green HRM training perspectives, from the basic premise of compliance, enabling the

conformance in the areas of regulations and technicality, to raising employee awareness in relation to the corporate agenda and, finally, creating a shift in organizational culture. More recently, Jabbour (2013b) empirical study links environmental training positively and significantly to the level of maturity in environmental management in companies.

Renwick et al. (2013) classified a number of different roles that HR managers may take-up in Environmental Management; these range from 'light green' to 'dark green' based on environmental competencies and business experience. This variation in green capabilities of managers could also have an impact on the level of green engagement. Boiral (2009) introduces the concept of Environmental Organizational Citizenship Behaviour, which can play a key role in the efficacy and efficiency of the greening process. An empirical employee level study in China indicates that organizational citizenship behaviour for the environment fully mediates the relationship between strategic human resource management and environmental performance (Paillé et al., 2014).

Research suggests that employees are more willing to undertake environmental initiatives when their supervisors embrace a democratic and open style of communication with regard to environmental ideas (Ramus, 2001) and when managers and supervisors actively involve employees at all levels towards improving environmental goals (Govindarajulu & Daily, 2004). Aragón-Correa and Rubio-López (2007) suggest that a lack of expertise will probably lead to wasted time and inefficiencies, tending to limit any major financial returns from environmental progress. Another way of motivating and engaging employees is through Green performance appraisals (Renwick et al., 2013). This will cover topics such as environmental incidents, use of environmental responsibilities and communication of environmental policies and will hold managers accountable for environmental management performance in addition to wider performance objectives. This development of both green dynamic capabilities and green transformational leadership is a useful starting point to improve green product development performance (Chen & Chang, 2013). At the same time, it is essential to win 'hearts and minds' of employees to keep them motivated and engaged in environmental initiatives. Therefore, an organizational culture that encourages employees to make suggestions and engage in activities that improve the environment is imperative for employee engagement (Renwick et al., 2013).

Overall, the human factor is a key success factor in organizations' environmental activities (Brio et al., 2007). It is now an almost a first step when organizations introduce new environmental initiatives to involve the wider workforce (Renwick et al., 2013). Employee engagement is a well-researched area; what appears to be lacking is the rich insight and narrative accounts of the individual employee experience in the field of Green HRM when developing and implementing new environmental initiatives.

### **Research context and methods**

This research was conducted in the British, German and Swedish subsidiary of a US restaurant chain. Herein, we will refer to them as UK Ltd, Sweden Ltd and Germany Ltd. Both UK Ltd and Germany Ltd are of a similar size, and Sweden Ltd is smaller in comparison. The case study organization was chosen because of its existing commitment to environmental responsibility and strategic aim to improve environmental sustainability. The rationale for inclusion of the different subsidiaries was two-fold: (1) they operate within a developed context that facilitates direct comparison and (2) the national



institutional environments differ, which may influence each subsidiary's approach to environmental sustainability. Globally, the organization aims to achieve standardization and consistency of operational practice and performance in relation to production, standards and quality. The organization's global environmental vision is to maximize positive environmental impact through key stakeholder groups: suppliers, employees and customers. For example, in the UK, the organization aims to enable and support suppliers to use scale to make industry-changing positive moves, achieve an environmentally empowered workforce and use high street presence to help consumers change their behaviours; this commitment is echoed in Sweden and Germany. The organization's scale can have impact on local, national and global communities, by working with hundreds of suppliers, employing thousands of staff and serving millions of customers. Pressure to develop sustainable business practices comes from a variety of sources, including, regulating bodies encompassing local authorities, national Governments and the European Union; collective agreements; works councils; consumer pressure; values and cultural beliefs; and competitiveness achieved from new environmental initiatives (Nidumoul, Prahalad, & Rangaswami, 2009; Royle, 2005).

The authors adopted an interview-based multi-case study approach (Eisenhardt, 1989; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Multiple cases provide the opportunity to identify patterns and underlying relationships through the close examination of themes and evidence. In relation to this research, the authors were able to explore different perspectives that were context specific, enabling a comparative analysis of approaches to Green HRM. The case study protocol is given in Table 1.

The study involved 23 one-to-one interviews with directors and managers, and 8 focus groups with 27 managers and frontline workers (Table 2). The hierarchical structure varied

Table 1. Case study protocol.

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*Case study steps*

1. Identification of research focus and scope
  2. Identification of individual subsidiaries to become 'multiple cases'
  3. Further development of research questions
  4. Identification of appropriate research instruments and protocols, including qualitative data gathering techniques such as semi-structured interviews and focus groups
  5. Identification of 'appropriate' participants: a vertical and horizontal slice of the case studies with experience of environmental and human resource management/development initiatives
  6. Data collection period – UK Ltd – September – November 2010
  7. External transcript preparation – UK Ltd
  8. Data analysis: within-case at single subsidiary level – UK Ltd
  9. Coding and development of overarching themes – UK Ltd
  10. Data collection period – Sweden Ltd – February 2012
  11. External transcript preparation – Sweden Ltd
  12. Data analysis: within-case at single subsidiary level – Sweden Ltd
  13. Coding and development of overarching themes – Sweden Ltd
  14. Cross-case analysis – UK Ltd and Sweden Ltd
  15. Data collection period – Germany Ltd – May 2012
  16. External transcript preparation – Germany Ltd
  17. Data analysis: within-case at single subsidiary level – Germany Ltd
  18. Cross-case analysis – UK Ltd, Sweden Ltd and Germany Ltd
  19. Coding and development of overarching themes
  20. Literature comparison: identification of similarities and differences
  21. Reaching closure: literature and data saturation achieved
  22. Dissemination: report and article development
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Table 2. Interview respondents.

<i>Job role</i>	<i>UK</i>	<i>Sweden</i>	<i>Germany</i>
<i>Category: head office staff</i>			
European Environment Director	–	–	1
HR Director	1	1	1
CSR Director	N/A	N/A	1
Head of Environment Department	1	N/A	N/A
Environment Manager/Consultant	1	1	–
Senior Manager Training	–	–	1
Operations Manager/Consultant	1	1	–
Assistant CSR	N/A	N/A	1
<i>Category: restaurant managers</i>			
Restaurant Business Manager/Franchisee	3	3	3
Restaurant Assistant/Shift Manager	11	–	1
<i>Category: frontline staff</i>			
Restaurant Trainer	1	–	1
Restaurant Frontline Staff	–	8	8
Total participants	19	14	18

across the three countries and [Table 1](#) shows this by identifying the role as not applicable where this position is not within the structure (N/A) and, where researchers were not able to interview a participant, this is acknowledged as a dash (–). Convenience dictated the sample size, the composition of the sample has a degree of homogeneity in the sense that all participants had been involved in a Green initiative, had experience of Green initiatives at head office or restaurant level or had a general awareness of the organization's current approach to environmental sustainability. Furthermore, the participants were drawn from both company-owned and franchisee restaurants.

The overarching interview questions were drawn from the review of the recent literature in the areas of alignment and employee engagement in environmental sustainability. The interview and focus group questions are provided in [Table 3](#).

The interviews began with a broad discussion of the organizations' current strategic organizational, environmental and human resource challenges at the local and national levels; and, current and future environmental management initiatives. The interviews then moved into the specific areas identified in the literature, including the role of the manager in engaging the workforce; alignment of HR with the operational functions including the environment; organizational structure, systems and culture. The one-to-one interviews lasted between 45 and 135 minutes and up to 135 minutes for each focus group. The interviews were transcribed by an approved supplier, providing over 750 pages of data.

### **Data analysis**

There were two inter-related phases in the data analysis. The first phase considered the situation and practices within each national location; the second phase identified the similarities and differences across the locations. The first phase involved within-case study analysis, building individual write-ups of each national location (Eisenhardt, 1989). Collecting data from secondary and primary sources and drawing on different methods, including one-to-one interviews and focus groups, facilitated a degree of methodological triangulation, insofar as it enabled the authors to develop a more detailed picture of each subsidiary. Then, the authors read through the transcripts independently, following a descriptive coding process that facilitated the identification of data that were relevant to



Table 3. Interview protocol and questions.

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*Interview protocol*

Introduce the interviewer/s and participant/s

Outline the research process

Outline the purpose of the research, including aims and objectives

Discuss potential research outcomes, ethical issues and obtain consent

Outline structure of the interview/focus group

*Research themes and specific questions*

Organisation Strategic Priorities and Context

1. What are the major strategic issues or challenges facing the organisation at a national and local level, including environmental and human resource management/development (examples might include cultural, operational, systems)?

2. Can you outline two or three examples (initiatives) of how the organisation is addressing the issues or challenges associated with environmental sustainability (national or local initiatives)?

3. To what extent are environmental and human resource management/development approaches influenced by key stakeholders (such as headquarters, local regulators)?

Organisation structure in relation to the environment and human resource management/development function

1. Where does the environment function 'sit' within the hierarchical organizational structure?

2. Why is the environment function situated in its current position?

3. What relationship does the environment function have with the human resource management/development; to what extent are they aligned?

Environmental and human resource management and/or development initiatives

1. Can you outline two or three human resource management/development initiatives that have been developed to address environmental challenges?

2. More specifically: what was the goal of the initiative? Was the initiative in response to a particular challenge? What has been your involvement with the initiative? What actions were taken to develop, implement and evaluate the initiative? What has been the impact of the initiative? What was your managers' involvement?

About you

1. What environmental practices are important to you?

2. What do you perceive as the main levers to achieve positive environmental impact (prompt behaviors, systems, processes, regulations etc)

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the research inquiry and focusing on the participants' personal and work-related experiences in the field of environmental sustainability. This process enabled a degree of investigator triangulation (King & Horrocks, 2010). The authors' involvement in the data-gathering stage varied; therefore, their relationship to the research topic and organization differed. Once the descriptive codes were agreed amongst the team, the next stage involved interpretative coding, which identified a smaller number of codes. Following this, the authors developed two preliminary themes embedded in the Green HRM literature. The authors followed a manual coding and thematic process. Table 4 shows the overarching themes and interpretive codes.

Once the individual case analysis was completed, the team conducted cross-case analysis to probe for similarities and differences in a way in which the three subsidiaries approach Green HRM (Yin, 2008). The team continued the cyclical and iterative process, moving backward and forward amongst the data and theory, enhancing the validity of the overarching themes, until such time as the outcomes and explanations were explicit (Gilbert, 2005). The findings are organized through thematic analysis to describe and discuss the two overarching themes, highlighting similarities and differences across all three subsidiaries. Participant quotations are used to illustrate themes and give a sense of the individual experiences at different levels of the organizational hierarchy.

Table 4. Overarching themes and interpretative codes.

<i>Positioning and alignment of the environment and human resource management/development function</i>	
<i>Overarching theme (1)</i>	
Interpretive codes	Overall commitment to environmental sustainability Human Resource function's relationship with the environment function
Exemplary interview/focus group quote	Strategic positioning of the environment function Subsidiaries' approach to environmental sustainability Specialist environmental role 'The environment is about behaviors so it should sit within the HR functions' (Restaurant Manager, UK Ltd) 'This Green Champion role requires specialist knowledge but more importantly requires people with energy, passion, persistence and the right attitude' (Head office staff member, Sweden Ltd) 'Strategic organizational challenges vary at the national and local level across Europe. Green Champion have been piloted in the UK' (Head office staff member, UK Ltd) 'CSR has to be embedded within HR processes such as training, development and retention (Head office staff member, Germany Ltd)
<i>Green employee engagement</i>	
<i>Overarching theme (2)</i>	
Interpretive codes	Integration of environmental indicators into the performance measures at restaurant level Role modelling leadership behaviours Green champions Challenges of stakeholder engagement Staff development and training
Exemplary interview/focus group quote	'If we can't measure it doesn't exist ... performance is mainly about bottom lines, targets and goals' (Business Manager, Sweden Ltd) 'Shadow of the leader – people do what I do not what I say' (Frontline staff member, Sweden Ltd) 'Raise awareness of environment initiatives within restaurants, feeding news ideas and insights back to head office and – hopefully – improve our (environmental) performance' (Head office staff member, UK Ltd) 'If you really want to develop a company towards sustainability you need to leverage the potential of the people' (Head office staff member, Germany Ltd)

## Findings

UK Ltd, Sweden Ltd and Germany Ltd were found to have developed a range of environmental management initiatives designed to address the subsidiaries impact on the environment. All three subsidiaries have waste separation facilities, and recycle waste such as cooking oil for bio-diesel fuel. In addition, they have extensive restaurant litter patrols in place and work with the local community to tackle causes of concern. Furthermore, there was evidence across all subsidiaries, to varying degrees of environmental training and energy measurement at restaurant level. Restaurant respondents from all three subsidiaries talked about the aforementioned initiatives within the context of organizational challenges and environmental impact reduction contribution.

At the time of the interviews, the key initiative in UK Ltd and Sweden Ltd was the launch of 'Green Champions'. In the UK, the initiative had progressed through the pilot stage and was rolling out countrywide. UK Ltd respondents confirmed that this was a positive shift towards engaging the workforce in environmental issues, helping people to reflect on their practice both at work and home. In Sweden Ltd, the subsidiary was about to embark on the pilot. Germany Ltd has invested in a non-financial controlling system that will standardize external sustainability against global reporting initiative standards. At the time of collecting the data, Germany Ltd had published its first Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) report and was working on its second annual publication. Further initiatives included, a CO2 compensation scheme, sustainability training in restaurants and company roadshows to bring sustainability to the forefront by focusing on key challenges. The following section presents the findings in relation to the two overarching themes explored in the literature.

### *Positioning and alignment of the environmental and HR function*

There are distinct variations in positioning of the environmental management functions in the three locations. In the UK, in the last five years, the Environment Department migrated between several different functional areas, settling into the HR function approximately three years ago. The rationale for the positioning of the environmental function within HR was driven by the UK Ltd belief that it has a critical role to play in creating and implementing sound environmental strategies. Responses to a question on the 'fit' between the environment and HR function confirmed that all UK respondents, excluding one, firmly believed that this was a natural fit: 'The environment is about behaviors so it should sit within the HR functions' (Restaurant Manager, UK). Respondents confirm that by making the environment part of HR, the business is recognizing the importance of employee involvement in environmental management. Therefore, the specialist role of the Green Champion scheme has been implemented to raise awareness and profile of environmental initiatives within the restaurants and feed new ideas and insights to the head office function to improve environmental performance.

In Sweden Ltd, the environmental function is now positioned within the communication team having shifted from the supply chain department. This demonstrates a strategic shift from operations to the need to communicate both internally and externally on the environmental performance of the company. This appears to be driven by the local need to maintain a positive brand image of the company cited as a key strategic challenge by respondents in Sweden Ltd. The key role of environmental management rests with one senior manager with the 'Green Champion' initiative at an early stage of implementation. In Germany Ltd, environmental accountability is a part of the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) agenda and, therefore, it can be argued that it is strategically placed

to offer sustainability benefits to customers, staff and the community through an integrated approach. The head-office personnel in Germany Ltd demonstrated a strong commitment to the sustainability agenda; the current emphasis is on holistic integration through the development of a non-financial controlling system to support the full and transparent collecting and recording of data. Germany Ltd is committed to producing, publishing and disseminating its second CSR report. The main rationale for the positioning of the environmental function within CSR is driven by their holistic approach to environmental sustainability. However, responses from restaurant managers and frontline staff revealed that internal integration of environmental issues is proving to be a challenge in spite of participative strategies such as road shows and '*green think tank*' to communicate the sustainability messages to staff. The key role of environmental sustainability appears to rest in the hands of a few senior managers with commitment to engage and raise further awareness amongst restaurant staff. As one manager commented: '... it is about going beyond routines, thinking about what you are doing and not just being like a machine but use your senses and common sense and being creative about environmental practices' (Restaurant Manager, Germany Ltd.).

Interestingly, the specialist role of the Green champions has not been introduced in Germany Ltd, as it is seen to be the responsibility of every restaurant manager. Here, although environmental sustainability is one of the overarching value-base of this organization, this approach is clearer in the case of UK Ltd with the focus on broad reaching staff engagement initiatives. In Sweden Ltd and Germany Ltd, realizing the need for sustainability appears to be via different routes – a strategic route in case of Germany Ltd through CSR and a possible defensive one in case of Sweden Ltd to address brand image. This indicates that the formalization of the inclusion of environmental issues in HR practices is not consistent across the three countries. UK Ltd appears to have a partnership approach having aligned their HR systems and processes to environmental activities in the last 2 years. UK Ltd respondents felt that by making the environment part of the people initiatives, the business has more engaged employees. The staff survey reflected this positively as 94% agreed that UK Ltd was committed to working towards reducing its environmental impact, underpinning its HR strategic vision of commitment, confidence and competence.

In Sweden Ltd, the involvement of HR in environmental practices is in sharp contrast to that of UK Ltd. The HR function in Sweden is seen as a support service by the respondents. The HR processes, in the view of the respondents, mainly focus on addressing negative media publicity by offering regular audit, support and guidance to managers to work within the legal framework ensuring compliance and identify ways in which restaurants can improve their HR practices. The role of the local union requires both HR and managers to work closely with them on decisions of employee performance. Lack of a corporate HR system was highlighted by one particular participant who commented specifically on the need for integration of the HR processes and environmental activities. The restaurant managers unanimously felt that the Environment Manager should be positioned within the operation function and that all environmental practices should be embedded in restaurant routines. One respondent stated: 'Restaurant Managers are pragmatic; they need to be able to see a workable solution to a problem in order to engage fully' (Head office staff, Sweden, Ltd). Here, the alignment with operational activities rather than HR is seen to be more effective in embedding environmental practices. However, several Sweden Ltd restaurant management respondents understood the benefit of a cross-functional role and the relationship between operations, communication and HRM, viewing the role of the Environment Manager as a business partner.

In Germany Ltd, the comprehensive alignment of HR processes with the operational strategies was highlighted as a challenge by both restaurant managers and frontline staff: ‘... there are sustainability plans, strategies, and activities on all levels of the organisation and so the alignment is very important’ (Head office staff, Germany Ltd). The aim to achieve a balance between economic growth, environmental stewardship and the people is a constant challenge. With focus on standardization of work processes to achieve quality and consistency, the HR challenge is to ensure the workforce is suitably qualified. Here, the main focus of the role appears to be educational. Head office staff highlighted that CSR: ‘... has to be embedded within HR processes such as training, development and retention’ (Head office staff, Germany Ltd).

Overall, although the overarching strategic HR priorities around workforce commitment, training and development are in principle embraced by all three countries, the specific HR initiatives supporting environmental practices vary considerably (Table 5). Factors that influence these variations in approach include structure, position and alignment of the HR and environment functions.

### *Green employee engagement*

Addressing environmental concerns through employee engagement and behavioural change were discussed with respondents from all three countries. In UK Ltd, over half of the respondents felt that engaging and embedding environmental practices were the greatest HRM challenges with employees facing ever increasing targets and heightened expectations around the core fundamentals, such as service and quality. As yet, environmental performance indicators are not perceived by the majority of respondents as a core requirement. In all three countries, the performance indicators consist of four quadrants, focusing on the customer experience, staff, finance and leadership. In the majority of respondent’s views, these indicators drive the key priorities and performance outcomes. However, the majority of respondents also acknowledge that the challenge is to raise the importance of environmental impact reduction. This might be achieved through the alignment of the organization’s strategic aim to improve environmental sustainability, operationalized in environmental practices and translated into key performance indicators. Respondents from all locations understand the need to measure performance in a result-orientated business: ‘If we can’t measure it doesn’t exist ... we are competitive; if we can’t measure it is not important ... performance is mainly about bottom lines, targets and goals’ (Business Manager, Sweden Ltd). This strength of feeling was reflected in the UK Ltd and Sweden Ltd by the majority of respondents. In the majority of cases, the respondents were aware that improved environmental performance would decrease costs, particularly in the area of energy consumption. The connection between energy consumption and cost reduction demonstrated the profit-focused orientation seen across all restaurants and a consistent approach to measurement. In some cases, restaurant managers felt that there was a greater need for clarity and consistency, particularly in the area of energy consumption and measurement and that the causal link between changes in practice and decreased costs was not entirely transparent. Other than financial key performance indicators, such as waste reduction and recycling, respondents did not recognize the integration of environmental indicators into the performance measures at the restaurant level. The importance of transparency and visibility in relation to restaurant environmental performance was cited by respondents across all three countries.

Respondents also highlighted the role of managers as a key factor in staff engagement with environmental initiatives. Frontline respondents in Sweden Ltd highlighted the

Table 5. Results comparison matrix.

<i>Overarching themes</i>	<i>Interpretative code</i>	<i>Similarities and differences</i>	<i>UK</i>	<i>Sweden</i>	<i>Germany</i>
Positioning and Alignment of the Environment and HR Function	Overall commitment to environmental sustainability	Similarities	Development of a range of initiatives and operational practices	Development of a range of initiatives and operational practices	Development of a range of initiatives and operational practices
	Strategic positioning of the environment function	Differences	Environment function aligned to the Human Resource function Green Champion Value-based	Environment function aligned to the Communications function Environmental Manager Defensive	Environment aligned to Corporate Social Responsibility function Leadership at Senior Level Strategic
	Specialist environmental role Subsidiaries' approach to environmental sustainability Human Resource function's relationship with the environment function	Differences Differences	Partner role	Support role	Educational role
	Integration of environmental indicators into the performance measures at restaurant level Role modelling leadership behaviours	Similarities	Not fully integrated	Not fully integrated	Not fully integrated
Green Employee Engagement	Green champions	Similarities	Recognized as important in employee engagement	Recognized as important in employee engagement	Recognized as important in employee engagement
	Challenges of stakeholder engagement	Differences	Green Champion – established role in restaurants Variations in waste management and collection services	Green Champion – early stage of implementation in restaurants Union and Local Authority agreements; disengagement of younger generation of consumers and employees	No specific initiative Variations in waste management and collection services
	Staff investment	Similarities	Commitment to staff development Frontline workers and supervisors – apprenticeship scheme	Commitment to staff development Modular training for all staff members	Commitment to staff development Restaurant manager and supervisor training
	Approach to staff development and training	Differences			



importance of having the ‘right leader’ to face the current challenges and provide clear direction in the future. The impact of role modelling was identified as a way of demonstrating the ‘right thing to do’. Focus group respondents referred to the ‘shadow of the leader – people will do what I do not what I say’ and confirmed that this message is communicated in their basic shift management training. Here, there is a similarity with Germany Ltd as the role of the manager was seen as the key to the success there too. Management respondents referred to the need to be a role model as ‘a shift leader to set an example’.

The implementation of ‘Green Champion’ in UK Ltd and Sweden Ltd is a strong indicator of the commitment to employee engagement to environmental sustainability in these subsidiaries. The purpose of the Green Champion was to: ‘... raise awareness of environment initiatives within restaurants, feeding new ideas and insights back to head office and – hopefully - improve our (environmental) performance against some key measures’ (Head Office respondent, UK Ltd). The overall aim of the initiative was to raise the profile of the environment within restaurants and encourage staff to think – and act – in a way that is better for the restaurant and the planet. This is expected to enhance the level of commitment, reinforcing the behaviours that drive environmental performance. Both UK Ltd and Sweden Ltd pitched the Green Champion position as a voluntary role and recruited individuals with drive and passion to maximize engagement. However, the hierarchical level varied across the two subsidiaries; in UK Ltd, the role was undertaken primarily by Shift Managers who had responsibility for staff training. In Sweden Ltd, the roles were more inclusive of frontline workers, with less focus on hierarchical position. All respondents felt that Green Champions should demonstrate a bias for action through their behaviour and positive attitude and have sound operational knowledge of the business; time served in the organization was less important. In Sweden Ltd, where the implementation of the green teams was at the developmental stage, there was concern about ownership and accountability. A number of respondents cited the differing levels of engagement and views amongst stakeholders about engagement with environmental engagement. Management respondents referred to the ‘younger generation’ (*between 16-25 years*) and their lack of interest in positive environmental practices. They also highlighted the difficulty they have in engaging with the local community and in particular getting ‘customer buy-in’. The wider stakeholders also present a challenge: ‘unions have no interest in environmental issues’. In addition, engaging with business partners such as waste collection services is difficult due to barriers caused by the rigour of local authority agreements.

In Germany Ltd, with a holistic approach to CSR driving environmental performance, engagement was clear at the senior head office level. Germany Ltd published its first CSR report in 2011, focusing on four areas including the eco-footprint and efficient use of resources such as energy. Head office respondents indicated that the next report would involve frontline staff contributing good practice stories around environmental initiatives within restaurants. However, frontline respondents explained that in relation to specific environmental measures such as waste management, energy consumption and litter control, they are unaware of their restaurants’ output and performance. Furthermore, responses from management and frontline staff in restaurants indicate that environmental issues are further down their list of priorities:

The most important people in the restaurant are the shift leaders. The shift leaders have rules how to manage their shift. They have, for example, a prioritisation system and it says to them your first priority is food safety, the second is quality and the third is service and the fourth is the ambience (Restaurant Manager, Germany Ltd).

Therefore, engaging staff to develop their understanding of environmental issues and support new initiatives is a challenge when there are a number of other competing priorities. Germany Ltd has a number of employee engagement initiatives at different stages of development and implementation. Currently, road shows are targeted to bring sustainability to the forefront, focusing attention on issues that challenge restaurants and their teams:

This idea of doing the roadshows my main task is really to implement sustainability change... it became very clear to me that internal audiences are as important as external audiences and that the focus, image and reputation alone will not do. If you really want to develop a company towards sustainability you need to leverage the potential of the people. (Head office respondent, Germany Ltd)

The commitment to invest in staff development and training at all levels of the hierarchical structure is consistent across all three subsidiaries. The way in which the three subsidiaries choose to do this is different. At the time of collecting the data, UK Ltd had launched the Apprenticeship scheme, available to all employees, giving them an opportunity to develop job-specific skills acquired through work-place training and gain a nationally recognized qualification. A core component of the scheme is the Environment Module that focuses on knowledge, skills and behaviours in relation to energy, waste, recycling and litter. More than 5000 staff members have completed the Apprenticeship; an additional 8000 employees are currently studying, all of which complete the Environment Module. In Sweden Ltd, environmental training is incorporated within the staff development provision through a modular approach, starting from induction to management training. In Germany Ltd, integration of environmental sustainability into training and development is still in the embryonic stage. German head office respondents clarified that future plans for environmental management training will incorporate key themes for restaurant managers as part of an overall developmental strategy to engage the workforce within the environmental sustainability agenda. The core elements of sustainability will be delivered via an e-learning module, the aims of which will be to ensure compliance and raise awareness in relation to environmental concerns.

Overall, the level and the depth of engagement are not consistent across all countries (for a summary of the differences and similarities, see [Table 5](#)). However, respondents in the different subsidiaries acknowledge that this a key challenge which they are trying to address. Sweden Ltd has adopted UK Ltd's Green Champion initiative engaging the workforce at the restaurant level. Germany Ltd, on the other hand, has developed an overarching corporate social responsibility strategy, which incorporates the environment and appears to be at the early stage of restaurant-level integration.

## **Discussion**

This section discusses the above results based on the key research concepts explored in the literature on environmental human resource management and development. The purpose of this study was to explore the way in which a global foodservice MNC approaches Green HRM in an international context, across three European countries. This enabled the comparison of Green HRM practices and behaviours, identifying similarities and differences, shedding light on some of the reasons that might explain the varying approaches. The authors identified two similarities: First, was the overall commitment to environmental sustainability (Jackson & Seo, 2010) of the MNC across the three subsidiaries, demonstrated through the range of initiatives developed and implemented within restaurants. Second, the lack of specific environmental key performance indicators

within the performance management system, which may hinder the ability of the organization to engage the workforce (Paile et al., 2014) in making connections between practice and impact. The influencing factors include, on the one hand, the organization's global environmental vision and, on the other, the challenges associated with defining operational targets and embedding these in environment practices in a global foodservice organization. The size of the firm can be positively associated with the degree of environmental activity (Hofer et al., 2012) as can the degree of stakeholder interest (Jabbour et al., 2015; Tatoglu et al., 2014).

Literature confirms the importance of the positioning of the 'greening' function as a key factor in improving the environmental performance of organizations (Ambec & Lanoie, 2008). Similar to Jabbour et al. (2010) empirical study on manufacturing companies located in Brazil, this case study also identifies variations in the degree to which HRM activities are aligned with environmental management, as there is inconsistency in the alignment and positioning of the environmental and HR functions. The key driver here appears to be the local cultural approaches such as value-based, strategic or even a defensive route (Cohen et al., 2012) determined by the business conditions and experiences within each subsidiary. Therefore, the relationship of HR with the environmental functions varies among a partnership, a supportive and an educational role. Here, the crucial role of HR in environmental sustainability as suggested by Jackson and Seo (2010) and Jabbour (2011) in their research is likely to affect environmental performance.

Although the need for active engagement of employees in green management is highlighted in the literature (Aragon-Correa et al., 2013; Boiral, 2009; Ramus & Steger, 2000; Renwick et al., 2013), this research suggests that employee environmental engagement strategies can vary. Companies that use green teams more intensively have more proactive and advanced greening functions (Jabbour, 2013a). The Green Champion approach to employee involvement, aimed at restaurant management and frontline staff in the UK Ltd and Sweden Ltd, is a specific environmental initiative but in Germany Ltd all restaurant managers are expected to incorporate this role within their day-to-day management responsibilities. These differences in approach both in terms of strategic focus and processes of implementation are influenced mainly by local conditions as presented in this case study. For example, in UK Ltd, the HR Director's commitment to the environment has accelerated employee engagement and the subsidiary has not recognized trade unions. On the other hand, in Sweden Ltd, HR services must work closely with the Unions to fully engage employees with new initiatives and this influences the strategic and operational focus. In Germany Ltd, the holistic approach to CSR is influenced by their position that environmental and social factors are key in their planning and decision-making and as such they have made a commitment to work towards a systemic quality assurance process.

Another variation is the environmental specialism of personnel within the three subsidiaries. Using Renwick, Redman, and Maguire (2008)'s 'shades of green' typology, the case study offers roles ranging from of the 'dark green' in Sweden where an environmental Manager has been appointed to provide environmental leadership to 'green' (green champions) in the UK and 'light green' (CSR leadership at senior level and restaurant manager) in Germany. The role of such specialist individuals or teams is supported by the literature on Green HRM as it recommends the use of green teams to address environmental issues, generate new ideas and foster environmental learning (Hartman & Stafford, 1997; Jabbour, 2011). Environmental training and green transformational leadership are recognized as a necessary requirement for improving

green performance (Chen & Chang, 2013; Jabbour, 2013b). Where engagement with front line staff is challenging, particularly with this type of organization-wide initiative, developing organizational citizenship behaviours (Boiral, 2009) is recommended to embed environmental practices within operational functions.

Finally, this case study enforces earlier empirical research, which suggests that employees who feel that their supervisors are supportive of environmental actions are more likely to try environmental initiatives than those who do not feel that their supervisors use supportive behaviours (Govindarajulu & Daily, 2004; Ramus, 2001, 2002). The importance of the role of the manager in employee engagement is also apparent from the research.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has identified a number of similarities and differences in the way in which a global foodservice MNC approaches Green HRM in an international context across three European subsidiaries. Although there is an overarching commitment to environmental sustainability, the positioning and alignment of the environment and HR function differ amongst the subsidiaries, as does the way in which the subsidiaries choose to engage the workforce in environmental sustainability. The study identified a number of factors that explain the differences in approach including, amongst others, strategic and performance drivers and cultural dimensions, such as relationships with key stakeholders. Furthermore, examples of environmental practices aimed at engaging the workforce are also presented.

A key implication for management practice from this empirical study is that embedding of routines within operational systems is essential to the successful implementation of any environmental initiative within a large foodservice MNC. Therefore, as the end product, i.e. food to be served to customers, is prepared by people and not machines, environmental behaviours would need to be developed and incorporated within operational processes to achieve consistent environmental outcomes. Whether it is the green teams or restaurant managers, their aim should be to embed green activities within the day-to-day routines and practices of the restaurants. Our results indicate that some practices, such as litter patrol and cardboard recycling, are part of everyday practice. Here, environmental training can be planned and designed to develop such behavioural competencies. However, to achieve proactive environmental management (Jabbour et al., 2010; Teixeira et al., 2012), the focus has to be on organizational behaviours that support environmental engagement, as in a people-orientated business employee engagement is fundamental to the organization's success. At a societal level, this highlights the need for ownership and accountability of people and community to support and replicate such behaviours.

Another implication is the extent to which cross-functional integration influences environmental sustainability from both a strategic and operational perspective. From a managerial perspective, understanding the impact of alignment between key functional areas in positively influencing environmental sustainability can provide the basis for discussion concerning the integration of key organizational practices, which can leverage employee engagement. From the point of view of teaching and learning, the extent to which context influences strategy and practice is worthy of further consideration, from both strategic management and learning and development perspective.

There are a number of limitations in this empirical study, some of which provide consideration for further research. First, this research incorporates both company-owned and franchised restaurants. What has not been addressed in this study is the degree

to which franchisees have the opportunity to innovate in the area of environmental management and the impact this may have on the wider-workforce engagement. Second, the research was restricted to Europe, therefore does not include the perspective of the parent organization and the extent to which the parent strategy influences the development of subsidiary strategies and practices, including the alignment of the HR and environment functions and the ways in which subsidiaries are able to engage their workforce in the sustainability practices. Third, the study considered the perspectives of individuals within the vertical hierarchy of the organization and the findings do not extrapolate and isolate the views of those working in a strategic, managerial or operational role. Future research can focus on each of these perspectives and consider the hierarchical influences on the strategic development of Green HRM and the implications for the management and operation functions in relation to policies, practices and behaviours. Fourth, although the study identifies the introduction of the Green Champion role as a key employee engagement strategy in UK Ltd and later, Sweden Ltd, the extent to which the role is effective in demonstrating positive organizational employee outcomes is yet unclear and therefore an area for further research.

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