Effect of High Involvement Work System on Green HRM: A conceptual paper on engaging employees in Environment Management

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ABSTRACT

While sustainability has been a proactive strategy to gain competitive advantage for firms (Jabbour, Santos and Nagano 2010), sustainability linked to Human Resources (HR) has drawn limited attention. This paper seeks to explore the potential of HR to engage and develop employee resources into an organisation's environment sustainability efforts. To create a new paradigm for 'Green HRM', the paper proposes the use of High Involvement Work Processes to generate innovative green HR practices and achieve behavioural change among the employees. This conceptual paper contends that High Involvement Work Systems concept may create effective employee engagement to promote an organisation's Environmental Management.

Keywords: Employee Engagement, Green Human Resource Management, High Involvement Work Systems, High Involvement Work Practices, Environmental Management

Ecological sustainability has emerged as a crucial attribute of business progress (Dyllick and Hockerts, 2002). Firms are reducing their ecological footprint, giving these firms a reputation for responsible business (Jabbour, Santos, and Nagano, 2010) and gaining competitive advantage (Daily and Su-chun, 2001). While other areas of business such as accounting, retailing, and management have considered sustainability as an influential aspect of firm activity (Wilkinson, 2005), the contribution of Human Resource Management (HRM) to sustainability has received only a relatively small amount of consideration from HRM theorists (Ehnert, 2009; Inyang, Awa and Enuoh, 2011). It is argued that incorporating green consciousness as a part of the organisational culture strengthens an organisation's adaptibility to change (Shrivastava, 1995). However, green culture as a sustainability strategy is contended to require behavioural change that may be difficult to achieve. Human Resources (HR) can be a significant strategic partner to drive sustainable business because it can personally engage employees (Preston and Sapienza, 1990). Although 'Green HRM' is a contemporary issue for scholars, this concept is still in its infancy (Wehling Hernandez, Osland, Osland, Deller, Tanure, Carvalho Neto, and Sairaj, 2009) especially in relation to 'Employee Engagement' aspects in bringing ecological sustainability to the workplace. The paper explores the role of HR in aligning employee green work attitudes and behaviours with the organisations' green strategies. This conceptual paper builds on 'High Involvement Work System' (HIWS) (Konard, 2006) approach to examine Green HRM's

capability to promote employee engagement in 'Environment Management' (EM). HIWS is a new wave of the HR field and we argue 'High Involvement Work Practices/Processes'(HIWP) may be used as strategic framework to discover innovative Green HR processes. The study will contribute to advance theory about using HIWS in EM and understanding of HR's potential as an environmental stewardship mechanism.

Aims and Objectives

The aim of the proposed study is to examine how HR can be a strategic partner in bringing employee engagement in EM. To accomplish the aim of the study, the following research objectives are set: a) To explore the relationship between specific HR processes and HIWP b) To identify how HR can effectively engage employees in green business using innovative green HR functions.

Structure of the Study

The major contribution of this study is that we add to theoretical underpinning of Green HRM by including insights from HIWS. First, we review existing conceptualisations of Green HRM, HIWS and HIWP in the literature. Combining these research fields, the next section suggests a conceptual framework to guide future research about the drivers of employee engagement in EM. Further, the results and discussion section discusses green HR functions within the domain of HIWP. The paper offers new insights into Green HRM by aligning sustainability with employee engagement under a high involvement work model

RESEARCH QUESTION

An influential body of research has shown a positive relationship between HIWS and employee engagement (Bailey, Berg and Sandy, 2001; Patterson, West and Wall, 2004; Zacharatos, Barling and Iverson, 2005). The aim of this study is to establish the compatibility of HR functions with the HIWP to strengthen the employee engagement levels in green business. The research question posed is:

RQ: What is the relationship between High involvement Work Processes and key HR functional areas to enhance employee engagement levels in green business?

METHOD OF ANALYSIS

Little is known about the dynamics of Green HRM and employee engagement. Firstly, a domain of theories that is likely to provide explicit insights into an appropriate level of analysis is outlined and explored. The paper adopts a literature review approach (Van Hoek, 2001) indicating significant concepts such as Employee Engagement, HIWS and HIWP to integrate Green HRM into EM in most effective manner. This paper uses content analysis (Weare and Lin 2000) and document analysis (Beck, Campbell and Shrives, 2010) to retrieve qualitative data and build the empirical knowledge base about Green HRM. Secondly, it is symptomatic to observe that the bibliography on Green HRM has a limited exposure to the functional areas of HRM. Moreover, not all HR processes are of equal strategic value to create employee engagement in EM. To answer the research question and capture disaggregating components in Green HRM, specific HR functions are categorised and classified in distinct way under different HIWP attributes using interpretive analysis (Bowen 2009). The aim of the interpretative studies is to gain in-depth understanding (Beck, Campbell and Shrives, 2010) on the relationship between HIWP and HR functions that are expected to make a contribution towards effective engagement in EM. The analysis process also combined thematic analysis to recognise overarching patterns and emerging themes within the existing literature as supported by Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review raises key concepts crucial to understanding Green HRM's role to engage employees in EM. This section outlines the concepts of Green HRM, Employee Engagement, HIWS and HIWP.

What is Green HRM?

Green HRM, a subset of Sustainable HRM (De Prins, Beirendonck, Vos, and Segers, 2014), is often used to specify the contribution of HR policies and practices towards the broader corporate agenda of EM (Opatha and Arulrajah, 2014). Many organisations have created EM strategies but adding a human element to sustainability is still in an early state (Wehling Hernandez, Osland, Osland, Deller, Tanure,

Carvalho and Sairaj, 2009). An organisation's workforce, according to soft HRM is a firm's greatest assets (Truss, Gratton, Hope-Hailey, McGovern, and Stiles, 1997). There is a growing interest in the strategic integration of HRM into EM (Jabbour, Chiappetta and Santos, 2008; Jackson, Ones & Dilchert, 2012). Implementation of Green HRM is argued to be achieved through employees' altruistic effort embedded in their behaviours or attitudes rather than enforcement (Collier and Esteban, 2007).To maximise individual's contribution in Green HRM, High Involvement Work Systems may bring innovative green HR practices (Ambrosini, Bowman and Collier, 2009).

Employee Engagement in Environment Management

Green HR practices are contended to require behavioural change by individuals (Muster and Schrader, 2011). Many scholars hold employee engagement to be an important catalyst to accelerate a firm's competiveness (Mendelson, 2005; Wadhwa, 2012; Vandenberg, Richardson, and Eastman, 1999). To effectively engage employees in environmental causes, according to Renwick, Redman, and Maguire (2013), an organisation needs employees' ownership rather than just seeking their consent or enforcing laws. An employee's Green signatures (green decisions and green behaviours), as explained by Jackson, Renwick, Jabbour, and Muller-Camen (2011), can be influenced by what an employee believes about the firm and its leaders' environmental intentions (cognitive aspect), positive or negative feeling (emotional aspect) and the value that their discretionary effort could bring to their work (behavioural aspect). Therefore, employee engagement can be a strategic link that can bind together the early research has been undertaken so far in Green HRM.

High Involvement Work Systems (HIWS) for Green HRM

There are two ways employers can support employee engagement in EM. The first approach, according to Liebowitz (2010) is employing the environmentally motivated and skilled workers. With this approach, resources might be of limited supply, thus the second approach as put forward by Rodrigo and Arenas (2008) is developing HR strategies to motivate and engage the existing workforce in EM. The approach to foster employee engagement in the current study is referred to as HIWS. An influential body of research has shown a relationship between HIWS and employee engagement (Bailey, Berg and Sandy, 2001; Patterson, West and Wall, 2004; Zacharatos, Barling and Iverson,

2005). According to Mendelson, Turner and Barling (2011), human capital is viewed as resources under a HIWS framework. Wadhwa (2012) mentions HIWS designs a set of HR practices known as HIWP to enrich the employees and gain competitive advantage. HIWS is argued to bring a participatory change process as it can be used as strategy to influence employees' capabilities and attitudes (Collins and Clark, 2003).

High Involvement Work Practices/Processes (HIWP)

Firms adopt HIWP to impact employees into an organisational change process (Boxall and Macky, 2007). It is argued Green HRM is an upcoming organisational change process (Van Eijnatten, 2000). Organisational effectiveness scholar Edward Lawler (1992) analysed four interlinked fundamentals as a foundation to HIWP to create a positive effect on employee engagement. These fundamentals are based on the notion of giving employees power, information, knowledge and rewards (Mendelson, 2005; Konrad, 2006). To explain further, giving power is important as employees can have authority and accountability to make key decisions maximising the quality of their working lives. Information provides employees timely and relevant data by which an employee can have a transparent understanding of a process and a link between their actions and performance of the firm. Knowledge is another component of HIWP that an employee possesses to take significant workplace decisions. Mendelson (2005) explains the importance of the rewards in supporting employees' discretionary effort. These HIWP are found to demonstrate higher engagement levels thus considering human capital in a firm to be its resources rather than just controlled expenses (Arthur, 1992).

THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK OUTLINING THE IMPACT OF HIWS ON GREEN HRM

Adapted from Vandenberg, Richardson, and Eastman's (1999) model that identifies a group of practices promoting involvement, Figure 1 shows a conceptual model that explores HIWS to realise the capability of Green HRM contributing to environment sustainability. An organisation's business strategies for EM can be the starting point for HIWS and this directly influences HIWP (Leana and Florkowski, 1992). The current study, as seen in Figure 2 proposes a link between HIWP and broader HR functions as strategic objectives to promote Green HRM. The innovative HR processes within the

HIWP's framework generates an effective employee engagement (Konard, 2006), thus resulting in an organisational effectiveness (Vandenberg, Richardson, and Eastman, 1999) and increased performance (Mendelson, Turner, and Barling, 2011; Richardson 2001). An engaged employee provides positive employee psychological arrangements (Wadhwa, 2012; Bakker, Hakanen, Demerouti, and Xanthopoulou, 2007) such as organisational commitment (Mendelson, 2005), job satisfaction (Leana and Florkowski, 1992) and greater innovation (Lawler, 1992; Lawler, Ledford and Mohrman, 1989). In strategic terms, to have greater impact of employees engaged in green business, it is argued the HR managers may need to provide employees power to make critical decisions, adequate knowledge, enough information to get involved in EM and also rewarding them for their high motivation. As such, the present study seeks to identify distinct green HR practices that would be conceptually relevant as integral to HIWP and create employee engagement.

Insert Figure 1about here

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The literature suggests that HIWS is a key driver for employee engagement. HIWP involves effective employee engagement that is achieved by providing the employees four effective tools: power, information, knowledge and rewards (Mendelson, 2005; Konrad, 2006). This section discusses the relationship between HIWP and specific HR functions to support environmental consciousness among the employees. The HR functions linked are Employee Participation, Team Work, Leadership, Recruitment, Selection, Organisational Culture, Training and Development, Performance Management and Contingent Compensation. The following explanation can be viewed in Figure 2.

Insert Figure 2 about here

Power

One of the fundamental elements to empower employees (Mallak and Kurstedt, 1996) is giving them the authority to make critical decisions. We argue the HR functional areas such as Employee Participation (Wadhwa, 2012), self-managed Team Work (Jabbour and Santos, 2008), and, Management and Leadership (Renwick, Redman and Maguire, 2013) are critical to allow employees

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to make changes and improve the environment without being micromanaged (Daily and Su-chun, 2001).

Employee Participation and Green Teams

Participation is one of the discrete HIWS components to achieve employee engagement (Konrad, 2006; Mandip, 2012). Participation generates a positive attitude towards any change process (Mendelson, 2005) affecting employees' beliefs, attitudes and behaviours towards taking environmental initiatives. The new workforce, beyond their functional contribution to the jobs, may seek self-actualised and meaningful opportunities to participate in green practices as a part of ethics and social responsibility to stay committed to their organisations (Wadhwa, 2012). The HR area may engage its employees in green habits such as car-pooling by providing free or discounted transportation passes, giving flexible working hours to volunteer in community organisations or involve employees to reduce waste (Mandip, 2012). Such participative opportunities empower employees to contribute to environmental issues while at work. HR Managers can build cross-functional teams to remove hierarchical layers (Pfeffer, 1998) to cultivate a feeling of self-value (Mendelson, 2005) and provide freedom to create ideas for best practices in EM (Jabbour and Santos, 2008). Further, the elimination of status differences fosters flexibility (Pil, 1996; Mendelson, 2005; Konrad, 2006) and this aspect creates better involvement in green initiatives that are being implemented in an organisation.

Supportive Management and Transformational Leadership

Senior management plays a significant role in checking the progress and effectiveness of the EM in an organisation. The HR managers can identify the training needs to sustain teams' motivation (Zacaratos, Barling and Iverson, 2005) and we contend that this could engender green commitment in the firm. Supportive management provides socio-political support (Kirmeyer and Dougherty, 1988) and encourages the employees to voice their opinion in sensitive environmental matters (Wadhwa, 2012) and give them the freedom to make environmental improvements (Daily and Su-chun, 2001). Transformational Leadership has not only the potential to counterbalance the negativity that could hinder teams to achieve their goals but also help the followers exceed performance (Mendelson,

Turner and Barling, 2011). Mandip (2012) also suggests that the trade unions can take a leadership role in creating a green participative environment or encourage employees to take more green jobs.

Information

Daily and Su-chun (2001) argue that a constant flow of information from top management empowers employees to take considered green decisions. Zoogah (2011) contends information assists persisting green behaviours. There are several ways that HR may communicate to the workers about the organisation's environmental goals and initiatives and what they are expected to do to accomplish those 'zero emission, zero waste' goals (Gupta and Sharma, 1996).These are by creating green jobs, green recruitment and selection and creating a green culture inside the organisation.

Green Jobs, Green Recruitment and Selection

The new age workforce is emphasising eco-sensibility as they choose their employers even at a lower salary (Renwick, Redman and Maguire, 2013) and hence firms with green employer brand (Jackson et.al., 2011) and EM related job opportunities (Mandip, 2012), may able to attract these knowledge workers. With the onset of technology, the HR department can spread the information among the HR employees as how to switch into a total paperless recruitment and selection process (Mandip, 2012). From online job ads, online application, online offers to creating online portals for on-boarding documentation, the HR department may hugely contribute to reduce waste. Moreover, a web-based recruitment may convey more information on the firms' ecological performances (Renwick, Redman, and Maguire, 2013; Jabbour and Santos, 2008). Job advertisements can ask the candidates to give proof of their environmental consciousness in their resumes. The interview process can be integrated with the company's sustainable development to evaluate the environmental protection capability of the interviewees. The new recruits can be well-informed about the company's environmental targets during the induction (Mandip, 2012).

Greening Organisation Culture

Bringing sustainable options to production alone cannot support long-term sustainability; therefore firms who believe in green philosophy have to incorporate deep embedded green values into

their corporate culture (Renwick, Redman and Maguire, 2013). Top management plays a significant role in recognising, integrating and spreading these values (Jabbour and Santos, 2008; Jackson et.al., 2011). Encouraging employees to bring lunch bags or prohibiting bottled water or paper cups in the office can incorporate recycling or reusing habits. Many energy saving options such as fluorescent lights at work stations, switching to public transport or carpooling, using frequent tele and video conferencing to minimise travel can be a company culture that can contribute to the environment at a daily basis. Having such options and informing the employees about these options is a responsibility of HR management. Setting up an ecological dimension in corporate culture creates a green influence in other HR functional areas such as recruitment, selection, training and development, performance management and rewards.

Knowledge

Apart from informing about the environmental management activities in a firm, employees are more engaged when they possess necessary knowledge and skills to contribute to the eco-conservation. Renwick, Redman and Maguire (2013) discusses that right environmental knowledge is critical to establish strong linkages between intentions and behaviours as well as knowing the 'negative' impact by disproportional environmental skills. The HR department is influential to enhance the knowledge by the employees on EM through Organisational Learning and Extensive Training on environment.

Organisation Environment Learning

The significance of organisational learning strengthens an organisation's efforts to create ecological balance. Incorporating his aspect could enable employees to learn new techniques and develop green skills. HR Department can use a preventive approach to make the employees aware of how pollution is caused and ways to reduce it. Organisational learning surrounding environmental management can be achieved by Learning by Doing: as employees can be involved in environmental activities in which they acquire pertinent knowledge on being green. Also new concepts related to green contributions can well be acquired through learning by exploration as posited by Jabbour and Santos (2008). Organisation learning qualifies employees to absorb, develop, transfer, and reflect on environment.

Extensive Environment Training

Training is a different function from learning where the latter encompasses the former. Participating in training needs prior learning and brings learning to some extent. As employees can be viewed as resources (Mendelson, 2005) that need a constant development, training is widely seen as a significant intervention to GHRM engagement (Jackson et.al., 2011; Wadhwa, 2012). Renwick, Redman and Maguire (2013) explains that training that is provided to all levels in the firm increases the 'eco-literacy' level of the employees and equips them with necessary KSAs (Knowledge, Skills and Abilities) and self-efficacy to deal with environmental issues. Mandip (2012) mentions a requirement of training need analysis (TNA) to scrutinise the level of environmental knowledge that the employees require. This may extend to re-training staff that have lost jobs in 'polluter' organisations. Imparting an effective training is highly essential to create experiences of psychological meaningfulness at work and hence, Jabbour and Santos (2008) suggested the HR department to keep the training simple and relevant, small group informal sessions, involving top management as role model, highlighting the employees' green achievements evaluating the training effects.

Rewards

Herzberg (1966) argues a well-designed reward system is key to performance motivation. Therefore, it can be argued that rewards are beneficial in endorsing the environmental practices by the employees. Proper rewards or compensation are an integral part of performance management that can motivate employees to invest their time and energy to maintain environmental safety.

Performance Management

Performance Management systems can set green targets to be the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) (Jabbour and Santos, 2008) or green behaviour indicators (Renwick, Redman, and Maguire, 2013; Jackson, Renwick, Jabbour, 2011) during performance appraisal (Mandip, 2012).This may be a significant yardstick for managers' capability in managing environmental performance. HR plays an important role in maintaining disciplinary procedures attached to environmental issues but they need to be cautious at using negative enforcement such as suspension or criticism in low violation cases

because it might create self-protective behaviours by the employees to conceal environment problems (Renwick, Redman, and Maguire, 2013).

Environmental Contingent compensation

HIWS emphasises rewards and enhances the motivational level to engage in the desired behaviours. Contingent compensation is critical to HIWS (Pfeffer, 1998) as it adjusts the employees' interests with a firm's targets (Mendelson, 2005). Rewards also empower the staff to take independent decisions about whether to continue with environmental practices (Daily and Su-chun, 2001). As a part of green rewards and promoting an environmentally-friendly workplace and lifestyle, employers may provide tax exemptions on loaning bicycling (Renwick, Redman, and Maguire, 2013) and green benefit cards to create more green products sale (Daily and Su-chun, 2001)The variable pay attribute is linked to compensation on the basis of employee's eco-performances. To encourage the manager, strong bonuses may be connected to their EM outcomes. Even the CEO and executive compensation may be linked according to the firm's environmental reputation (Jackson et.al., 2011). Non-monetary rewards such as recognition-based programs or award dinners for staff engaged in EM activities creates intrinsic motivation among the employees invest more in the corporate environmental initiatives (Mandip, 2012; Renwick, Redman, and Maguire, 2013).

Relationship between HIWP and HR functions

The aim of this study is to explore the link between HIWP and HR processes. From the existing literature, it is found the HR functions can be categorised into the four interlinked fundamentals of HIWP with the possibility to realise the full potential of Green HRM. HR processes such as Employee participation, Team work and Management and Leadership empowers employees to make critical decisions to maximise the quality of their working lives. Green Jobs, Recruitment and selection and Greening Organisation Culture is included in the Information category because these functions provide employees timely and relevant data to understand the EM inside the organisations. As explained by Mendelson (2005), rewards are key attribute in bringing employees' discretionary effort. To support higher employee engagement, HR processes such as Performance Management and Contingent compensation are grouped under rewards.

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All these suggest that HR processes uses a HIWS to create a situation in which employees may be more willing to contribute to the environment rather than being forced (Collier and Esteban, 2007). The strategy to incorporate HIWS is focussed on behavioural change by individuals. It is argued these HR functions within the framework of HIWP may leverage employees' psychological arrangements, fostering positive emotions such as organisational commitment (Mendelson, 2005), job satisfaction (Leana and Florkowski, 1992) and greater innovation (Lawler, 1992; Lawler, Ledford and Mohrman, 1989).

CONCLUSION

Our goal at the outset was not to provide best solutions to uplift Green HRM rather to explore theoretical concepts that is being ignored and this can be a reason to have plagued the development of Green HRM. The Strategic HRM assumption that organisational HR practices are more than a cost to be reduced but a potential source of competitive advantage (Becker and Huselid, 1998) is the underpinning approach in this paper. The literature on employee engagement, and HIWS and HIWP have been reviewed, each of which are interlinked and develops concepts to advance Green HRM. Building on the literature, a conceptual model is proposed that aids the implementation of HIWS to Green HRM. The study offers a relationship between key HR functions and HIWP to provide horizontal fit of HR with the firm's green efforts. Distinct HR processes are categorised into HIWP including power, knowledge, information and rewards. The research found high level employee engagement outcomes in green practices as social responsibility and not social obligation. The research has examined that High Involvement Work System (HIWS) can promote HR as a significant change agent to develop green work attitudes and green behaviours.

Horizontal fit refers to achieving internal consistency (Delery and Doty, 1996) of Green HR policies and vertical fit refers to HR's alignment to firms' environmental goals. The current study recommends future work is needed to draw Green HRM into organisations' policy level so that a vertical fit is ensured. To advance engagement of employees in EM, there is a need to research to examine the dynamics of HIWP and HR functions to ensure a horizontal fit of Green HRM in EM studies.
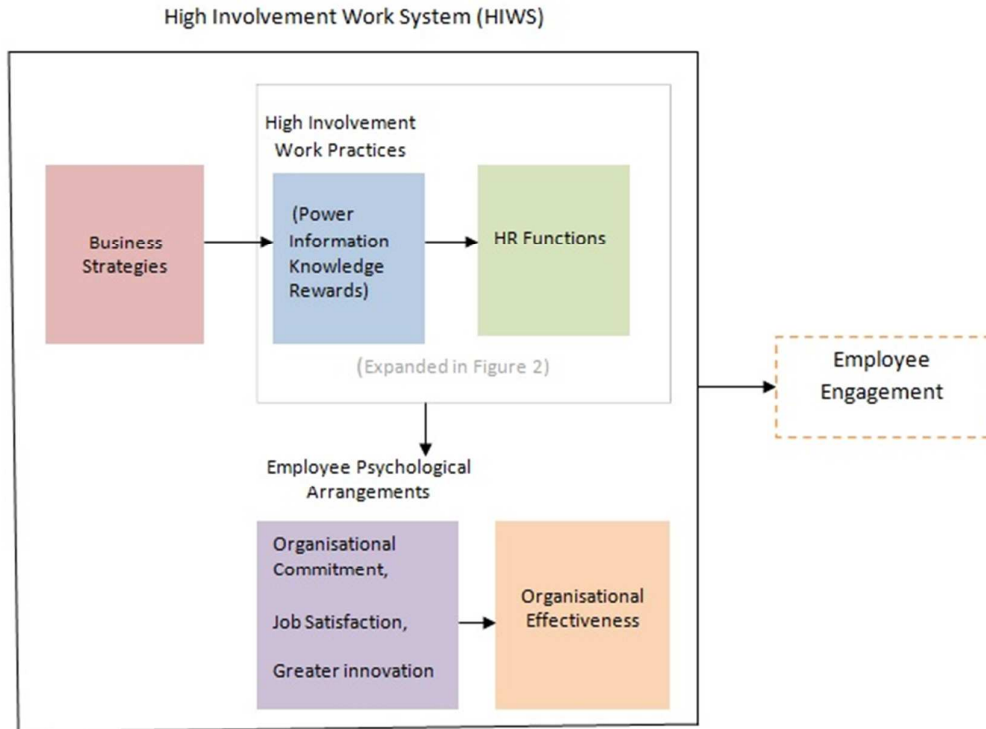
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FIGURES

Figure 1: High Involvement Work System (HIWS) for Green HRM

High Involvement Work System (HIWS)

High Involvement
Work Practices

Business
Strategies

(Power
Information
Knowledge
Rewards)

HR Functions

(Expanded in Figure 2)

Employee
Engagement

Employee Psychological
Arrangements

Organisational
Commitment,

Job Satisfaction,

Greater innovation

Organisational
Effectiveness

Adapted from Vandenberg, Richardson, and Eastman's (1999)

Figure 2: Relationship between High Involvement Work Practices and HR functions

High Involvement Work Practices (HIWP)

Human Resources (HR) Functions

Power

- Employee Green Participation
- Green Teams
- Supportive Management and Transformational Leadership

Information

- Green Jobs
- Green Recruitment and Selection
- Greening Organisation Culture

Knowledge

- Organisation Environment Learning
- Extensive Environment Training

Rewards

- Performance Management with green KPIs
- Environmental Contingent Compensation