

Article

The Implementation and Barriers of Green Recruitment: A Qualitative Study on Green Human Resource Management

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Abstract: Green human resource management (GHRM) has become an indispensable strategy in green management. As the first step of GHRM, green recruitment and selection (GRS) has been emphasised as the important and probably the only practice to help the firm obtain green human capital directly. However, research has shown that not many firms implement GRS in practice, and there is a lack of studies exploring the barriers to GRS. This study fills this gap by examining the barriers to GRS across different industries in China. It adopted a qualitative and inductive approach, which is relatively rare in the GHRM field. Based on interviews with senior managers, a number of barriers were revealed in relation to the two components of GRS: paperless recruitment and green candidates. More specifically, two new factors that have not been reported in the existing literature were identified: the alignment between the job profile, green practices, and profit orientation. These two factors have both theoretical and practical implications.

Keywords: green human resource management; green recruitment and selection; barriers to GHRM; green human capital; paperless recruitment



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1. Introduction

With the rapid growth of the economy, environmental pollution and degradation emerge frequently from business activities [1], leading to a series of complex, dynamic, and multifaceted corporate environmental problems [2] with destructive impacts on the broader population. During the last two decades, it has become a global consensus that management activities should fully respect society and the environment [3]. Thus, industries and organisations are encouraged to adopt sustainable business management strategies, embrace green business policies, and fulfil corporate social responsibilities [4]. Nonetheless, a large number of studies show that firms do not implement green management strategies at the same level. While some do little to practice environmental management policies, an increasing number of firms are taking a relatively proactive approach to green business [3,5–9].

Research has shown that employees play a decisive role in implementing a firm's environmental policies [10]. As a result, the concept of “green human capital” has emerged, defined as the summation of employees' knowledge, ability, experience, wisdom, creativity, and commitment to environmental issues [11]. Many organisational efforts on green transformation failed due to the unchanged nature of human resource practices, and low employee motivation was seen to increase the difficulty of environmental change [12]. In this context, green human resource management (GHRM) has recently become a research topic at the intersection of corporate environmental sustainability and human resource management (HRM) [13,14]. It has been seen as a new tool for managing employees and developing an environmentally capable workforce to promote environmental management activities and strengthen organisational environmental performances [15,16]. According to

Tang and Chen [17], GHRM practices are divided into five dimensions: green recruitment and selection, green training, green performance management, green pay and reward, and green involvement.

In recent years, several researchers have unveiled how GHRM practices can help the firm acquire more green human capital [18,19]. Green human capital can be fostered by GHRM in two different ways: acquiring green human capital and developing green human capital. Green recruitment and selection can help the firm acquire green human capital from the external talent pool directly [20]. The other four GHRM practices are adopted to increase the green knowledge and awareness of employees already working in the firm [21].

Although green recruitment and selection (GRS) has been regarded as the only GHRM practice that can help the firm obtain green human capital directly [21], it is the least adopted among the five dimensions in the practice [22]. This indicates challenges and barriers related to GRS adoption in organisations. The existing literature on GHRM barriers is largely developed from a macro perspective [22], looking at all five GHRM practices as a whole. However, GRS is different from the other four GHRM practices, as it aims to attain green human capital directly rather than develop them [13]. The barriers to GRS implementation may differ from other practices; some studies on GHRM barriers directly address “Challenges in recruiting green talent employees” as one of the major barriers to GHRM implementation [23]. To gain a holistic understanding of why GRS is less implemented in enterprises compared to other GHRM practices, there is a need to determine the barriers to GRS implementation that may finally hinder the firm from acquiring green human capital from the external talent pool.

The contribution of this paper is to identify barriers that may prevent the firm from acquiring green human capital directly. It first reviews the existing literature, discusses the development of GHRM and GRS practices, and then presents a detailed review of the barriers to GHRM implementation. After explaining the research method, this paper presents and discusses the identified barriers to GRS. In particular, this paper highlights two factors that have not been discussed in the previous research: the alignment between the job profile, green practices, and profit orientation, and draws out the implications.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Green Human Resource Management (GHRM)

GHRM has been adopted by organisations to foster a green mindset and green-orientated behaviour among employees and is identified as a part of the firm’s green management strategy [15]. The concept of GHRM was first proposed by Renwick and Redman [16]: it is the alignment of employee involvement to achieve the firm’s environmental goals. In 2013, they developed a more comprehensive definition: it is a combination of all activities that help the firm to reduce their energy usage, natural resource consumption, and unnecessary waste through recruiting and training the human capital, establishing a proper performance management system, and using compensation and reward as motivation [21].

There are various reasons why a firm applies GHRM. First, it can help the firm to increase its employees’ environmentally conscious behaviour. Since one barrier to employees undertaking green jobs is the lack of environmental knowledge [24], the relevant green training and education can improve employees’ environmental knowledge, skills, and abilities and stimulate employees’ green values [25]. Second, GHRM can enhance employees’ job satisfaction [26]. Paillé and Valéau [27] conducted a questionnaire survey of nurses and found that GHRM practices such as involvement, training, and performance management enhanced employee satisfaction with organisational environmental engagement.

Third, GHRM helps the firm establish its green image [28] and gain competitiveness in the labour market. The reputation for adopting green practices is deemed an effective way to attract new candidates with green talent [29,30]. As such, companies with GHRM can gain a stronger competitive advantage through the combination of better environmental and organisational performance [31]. Finally, GHRM policies are essential in leading to the environmentally sustainable development of a firm. As firms face external pressure

to improve their environmental impact from various stakeholders and sources, such as customer expectations, government legislation, and national cultural values, it is beneficial that they adopt GHRM to reinforce the effectiveness of the organisation's sustainable development strategy [32].

Currently, the mainstream of GHRM practices is divided into five practices: green recruitment and selection, green training, green performance management, green reward, and green involvement (definition in Table 1) [17]. This can be explained by the theory of ability, motivation, and opportunity that has been used frequently in the HRM area. It proposed that HRM practices can enhance employee capabilities and lead to improved performance outcomes, such as higher productivity and quality, reduced waste, and profits [33]. In the GHRM context, "Ability" means "Helping the firm to attract and develop talented staff who can achieve the firm's environmental target" [21]. GHRM policies like "Green Recruitment and Selection" and "Green Training" can be regarded as "Ability". "Motivation" uses environmental performance management to appraise the employee's green behaviour and then offer them the corresponding rewards. Hence, green performance management and green reward are two decisive elements in "motivation". "Opportunity" means that the firm should offer opportunities for employees to participate in the firm's environmental programs [26].

Table 1. The definition of each GHRM practice.

GHRM Practices	Definition
Green Recruitment and Selection	Select candidates who demonstrate a commitment and sensitivity to environmental issues, and who are willing to contribute to these through internal or external recruitment processes.
Green Training	Establish a learning system focused on environmental issues to enhance employees' awareness and skills for environmental responsibilities in their roles.
Green Performance Management	Evaluate employees' environmental performance through the operational process to assess their contribution to the organisation's green goals.
Green Reward	Monetary and non-monetary incentives to employees whose attitudes or behaviours help the firm's environmental management.
Green Involvement	Employees are offered the chance to take part in environmental management initiatives which encompass participation, and fostering a culture of support and knowledge, all aimed at enhancing the employee's dedication toward the organisation's environmental management.

2.2. Green Recruitment and Selection (GRS)

The literature has identified two components of green recruitment and selection (GRS). The first is paperless recruitment and selection [34]. It refers to completing the recruitment and selection through a digital recruiting system to reduce paper usage. On top of reducing natural resource consumption, paperless recruitment reduces a firm's operational costs and helps the firm become more economical [34]. During the recruitment step, more and more firms put their recruitment job descriptions on social media applications, such as LinkedIn, to recruit people. In Canada, many green job announcements are posted on GoodWork.ca, which is regarded as the largest platform for green worker recruitment in Canada [35]. For the selection process, the interview is usually conducted via online meeting software like Zoom, which also avoids transportation and fuel consumption [36].

The second GRS component is green candidate recruitment [13,20]. It refers to the process of attracting and recruiting potential candidates who are interested in protecting the environment. Recruiting green candidates was first proposed by Wehrmeyer [10], who asserted that such recruitment practices could help the firm increase its environmental performance. Tang and Chen [17] stated that green recruitment and selection should comprise three aspects: “attracting candidates with green awareness, promoting the green image, and making green criteria to select and recruit new candidates”. Nevertheless, the green image can be generated by any green management strategy; it is not necessarily a specific function of GRS.

Recruiting green candidates can help the firm acquire employees who truly care about environmental issues [31], which in turn will increase the firm’s sustainability. This is in line with the AMO theory [21,37]. Employee motivation towards environmental issues plays a vital role in achieving an environmental action-based advantage, such as green consciousness and conscientiousness [38,39]. Besides alluring pay and welfare, the rising awareness of and emphasis placed on the resonance between their values and organisational values increased considerably among young job seekers who, in addition to seeking attractive pay and benefits, also seek a close fit between their values and values of their organisation [13,40].

Based on the literature, this paper defines GRS as the process of selecting and recruiting candidates with knowledge, skills, and initiatives that align with the firm’s environmental ethos (recruiting green candidates) through a paperless recruitment system or approach (paperless recruitment).

2.3. Barriers for GHRM Implementation

Previous research has identified four main barriers (shown in Table 2). First, the lack of concern about environmental issues and engagement presents a significant barrier [41]. This lack of engagement occurred both at the organisational and individual levels. From the organisational perspective, one study conducted on the UK civil aviation industry found that one major barrier to green initiatives was “a lack of involvement and participation” [42]. One interviewee in this study mentioned that he had never seen any airline pay anything other than “lip service” to green issues. At the individual level, both leaders and workers showed low environmental awareness [43]. Some studies have found a lack of leadership support in the hotel industry. Sathasivam and Abu Bakar [44] found that some HR managers in Malaysian hotels found “difficulty in convincing and coordinating with top management on environmental sustainability issues”. The dearth of top management support causes low employee environmental engagement as well [45]. According to Sobaih’s [46] research on a hotel in the Red Sea Region in Egypt, employees are blamed for a “lack of awareness of the green practice”, and the hotel is blamed for a “lack of green culture” as well. A CEO in India interviewed in the research stated that their employees currently have “weak incentives for achieving green targets” [22].

The second barrier concerns financial resources [22,47]. More than two-thirds of the total respondents in more than 300 Polish firms gave feedback that the most crucial requirement to implement GHRM in the firm is financial support; the same situation appeared in both the Indian automobile industry [48] and Ghanaian firms [47]. As Milton Friedman stated in his shareholder theory, maximising the shareholders’ profits is always the first thing a firm is concerned about. Indicators such as return on asset (ROA) and Tobin’s Q show that there is not a linear relationship between CSR performance and growth rates [49]. Although green training fees, the cost of green theme activities, or green monetary rewards are treated as an investment in the firm, they can only be regarded as long-term investments. However, there are too many uncertainties about whether this investment will be repaid in the future [50].

The third barrier to implementing GHRM practices is the ambiguity of green HRM policy and the measurement of its effectiveness. From the research in the oil industry in the Middle East [51], 31 oil HR experts concluded that apart from the lack of engagement and

proper infrastructure, the third important variable that increases the barrier to GHRM is the lack of understanding of green policies. There is usually an absence of organisational documentation and policy on GHRM. Besides this, the lack of valid measurement models to judge and evaluate the Green Effectiveness is also a notable issue for the GHRM practice adoption [23]. This aligns with Tweneboa Kodua and Xiao's [47] research in Ghanaian firms, who found that the vagueness of green values measuring is a barrier to GHRM implementation.

The last barrier was found by Yuan et al. [52]. Their research in a large-scale construction company in China found that overemphasis on GHRM results in emotional exhaustion among employees. First, GHRM requires employees to learn new skills (green training) and extra-role activities (green involvement), which could consume their time and energy. Second, GHRM may put environmental pressure on employees, potentially impacting negatively on their psychological and physical resources. Finally, implementing GHRM practices can lead to significant changes in organisational systems, practices, and cultures, necessitating employees to allocate additional resources to adapt to these new requirements. This adjustment process can lead to exhaustion among employees as they embrace these new approaches. Furthermore, the resulting job-related uncertainty stemming from these changes can add to the overall stress experienced by employees.

Table 2. The Barriers to GHRM Implementation.

Barrier	Reference
1 Lack of engagement in green issues (both organisational and individual)	Jackson & Seo, 2010 [41]; Harvey et al., 2013 [42]; Sobaih, 2019 [46]; Tanveer et al., 2023 [53]
2 Financial Pressure	Sapna & Gupta, 2021 [22]; Tweneboa Kodua et al., 2022 [47]; Tanveer et al., 2023) [53]
3 Ambiguity of GHRM policy and the effectiveness measurement	Agarwal & Kapoor, 2022 [23]; Tweneboa Kodua et al., 2022 [47]; Fayyazi et al., 2015 [51]
4 Emotional Exhaustion	Yuan et al., 2023 [52]

2.4. Research Gaps

While a growing number of articles discuss GHRM's outcome and barriers [25], GRS is the least studied of all five GHRM practices [22]. Some empirical studies even excluded GRS [54], as the sample firms they chose did not implement GRS practices. In addition, existing literature on GHRM's barriers considers GHRM practices more generally [46], while the finding cannot fully address the specific GRS barriers which are used to obtain green capital directly rather than develop green human capital. As such, there is a need for in-depth research to identify the barriers to GRS.

Furthermore, there are only a small number of qualitative research articles focusing on GHRM, such as the study by Leidner et al. [55], in which interviews were conducted to explore GHRM practices in European firms, and a study by Harvey et al. [42] which investigated GHRM in the UK's civil aviation industry, and also Sathasivam and Abu Bakar's [44] research on how GHRM supports the Malaysia electronic company's environmental sustainability. However, none of these studies explored GHRM barriers. To gain new insights and develop new knowledge of GRS, which is currently understudied, it is important to explore its adoption and issues with HR professionals. A qualitative methodology is used to investigate GRS implementation in Chinese firms and organisations.

3. Research Methods

This paper adopts a phenomenological approach to obtain an appreciation of personal experiences through the consciousness of the experiencer [56]. It can provide insight into the current situation of phenomena, deepen understanding, and provide rich and authentic empirical data [57]. Phenomenology follows the hermeneutic research tradition of conducting research in a naturalistic environment [58]. Semi-structured interviews

were used to collect data from research participants, with deep probing to assist them in explaining and elaborating their perspectives [59].

Former qualitative studies of GHRM, which used semi-structured interviews, typically chose to interview fewer than 20 employees. Pham and Tučková [60] chose two hotels as their case study sample. Sathasivam and Che Hashim [43] selected three Malaysian automobile companies to interview their managers. Islam et al. [61] interviewed 12 managers from the garment industry in Bangladesh. Leidner and Baden [55] contacted 15 interviewees (seven different industries, each industry contained less than 4 four companies) in Europe for their research. As such, the sample in this study only contained experienced individuals who would be sufficiently knowledgeable and qualified to answer the questions [62]. It consisted of 20 senior managers and leaders in higher positions from different industries and organisations which have implemented GRS practices to some extent. All of these organisations were based in China, with six financial institutions, three operating in energy industries, two IT companies, four neighbouring community committees (non-profit organisations), two in the food industry, two in the hotel industry, and one in the petrochemical industry (participant details are shown in Table 3).

Table 3. Details of the interviewees and industry type.

No.	Firm Type	Industry Type	Role	Industry Category	Profit Oriented
1	Neighbor Community	Non-profit Organization	Leader of Community		
2	Neighbor Community	Non-profit Organization	Leader of Community		
3	Neighbor Community	Non-profit Organization	Leader of Community		Non For-Profit
4	Neighbor Community	Non-profit Organization	Leader of Community		
5	Public Fund	Financial Institution	HR Manager		
6	Public Fund	Financial Institution	Fund Sales Manager	Low Carbon Emission	
7	Investment Bank	Financial Institution	CEO		
8	Investment Bank	Financial Institution	HR Manager		
9	Commerical Bank	Financial Institution	HR Manager		
10	Futures	Financial Institution	HR Manager		
11	AI	Information Technology	Leader		
12	Website Production	Information Technology	Owner		For profit
13	Oil	Energy	HR Manager		
14	Oil	Energy	HR Manager		
15	Gas	Energy	Training Manager		
16	Chemical	Chemical industry	HR Manager	High Carbon Emission	
17	Restaurant	Food Industry	Owner		
18	Restaurant	Food Industry	Owner		
19	Hotel	Hotel Industry	HR Manager		
20	Hotel	Hotel Industry	HR Manager		

As Rayner and Morgan's [26] research suggested that future research should find out how the industry type can influence GHRM practice implementation. However, they found that the degree of GHRM implementation was not decided by the severity of the company's

pollution. To extend their finding, different industry categories were chosen to enable comparisons to reveal both the similarities and differences in their practices and to identify underlying reasons. The first is to divide firms based on their pollution severity, which is categorised into the low carbon emission group and the high carbon emission group. The second is based on whether the firm is profit-oriented or not, which is categorised into for-profit and non-for-profit.

All the interviews were conducted through a Chinese meeting application called “Tencent Meeting”, which is somewhat similar to Zoom. Each interview lasted about 60 min. During the interview, the participants were encouraged to share their personal working experiences on the practices, benefits, challenges, and barriers related to implementing GRS (details shown in Figure 1), including paperless recruitment and recruiting green employees. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and translated into English. In line with an inductive approach [63], the data were thematically analyzed. In other words, codes and themes were identified and drawn out of the data rather than predefined based on existing theory.

Interview Guide
1 Explaining research process
2 Asking the fundamental information about the firm
3 Asking whether the firm has adopted Paperless Recruitment and what are the barriers
4 Asking whether the firm has adopted green candidate recruitment and what are the barriers
5 The personal complements

Figure 1. The introduction of the interview process.

4. Results and Discussion

A number of barriers emerge from the interview data, and they can be grouped into “Paperless Recruitment Barriers” and “Green Candidate Recruitment Barriers” (see Figure 2). These two groups of barriers may prevent the firm from obtaining new green human capital.

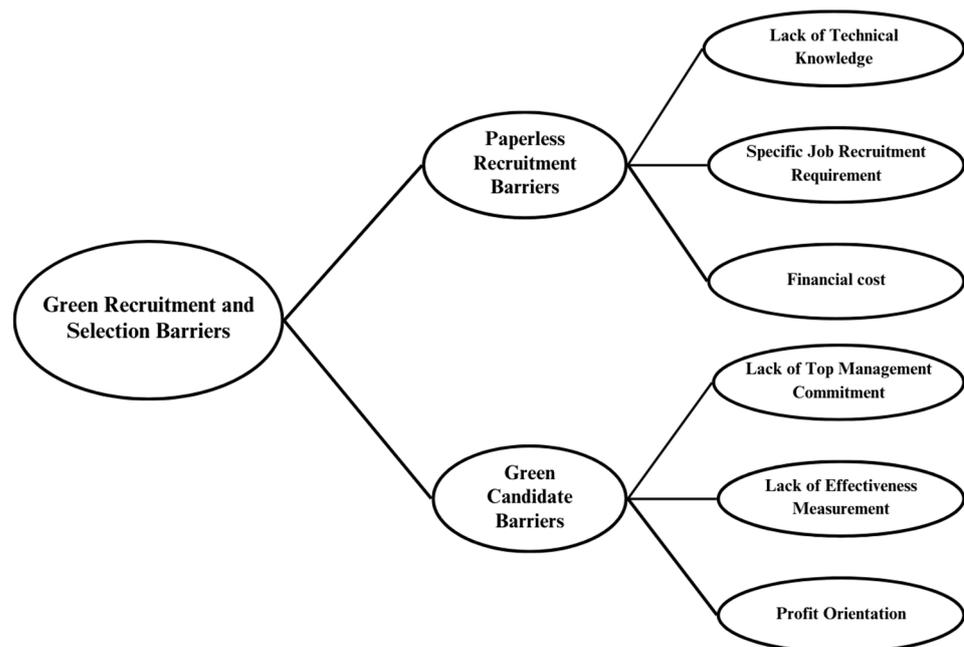


Figure 2. Interview Content Analysis Themes.

4.1. Paperless Recruitment

Regarding the adoption of paperless recruitment, the responses given by the respondents varied due to the differences in their respective industries. Interviewees from financial institutions, IT companies, and two of the neighbouring community committees responded positively toward establishing the “Paperless Recruitment” system, and they believed that making the recruitment paperless could save money and time. The HR manager in one of the public fund companies regards “paperless recruitment” as being able to save both their time and cost:

“In fact, before 2019 (COVID-19), we still preferred paper resume delivery and face-to-face interviews because they seemed more formal. We were also afraid of fake information candidates may provide. However, after the pandemic started, the relevant government policies encouraged people to reduce face-to-face contact, so we gradually moved our recruitment process online. On the one hand, since China’s online recruitment platforms are very advanced, such as Zhaopin Recruitment, candidates can make their resumes into electronic versions and send them through the platform or our company email. If the candidate successfully gets shortlisted for an interview, we will use the electronic conference software Tencent Conference to conduct the interview. Most of the time, our company can’t really meet new employees face to face before they enter the company. In my view, paperless recruitment is much more convenient than the traditional recruitment that we used a few years ago. It can reduce the company’s paper and electricity expenses and save time.” (Interviewee No. 5).

This response also indicates that paperless recruitment can be expanded to include travel-free (virtual) interviews, which saves travel costs and related environmental costs. This was made popular, or rather imposed, by the pandemic-induced lockdowns and social distancing measures.

One leader in a neighbouring community committee reported that they had made all their interview processes email and telephone-based, but their original intention was not to keep their recruitment environmental practices but to test their candidates’ computer proficiency:

“The new employees recruited by our community in the past two years are basically contacted by email. It is a shame. When we first implemented paperless recruitment, environmental protection was not considered. What we want to achieve is that recruitment can save us time; because our workload is very high, if we can save some time on recruitment, we can help more with those who really need help. On the other hand, through this, we can also examine the candidates’ proficiency in computer use. As a community, a large portion of our work is listening to residents’ opinions and appeals. Nowadays, more and more people tell us their problems through email and telephone. We really need employees with certain computer knowledge to help them. While paperless recruitment can help us to test whether these candidates have a basic handle on computers to a certain extent.” (Interviewee No. 2).

However, respondents from the energy, hotel, and food industries expressed different viewpoints. Some of them perceived that it was still unrealistic to transfer the recruiting model online due to their workers’ knowledge of computers, as highlighted by one owner of a restaurant:

“I must admit that the idea of paperless recruitment is good, but the reality is cruel. As a catering company, most of the employees we recruited are waiters and chefs. Most people who come to us to apply for jobs have relatively low educational qualifications, and many do not use computers. Many people do not have their computers because their income is not so good. So, do you still expect the interview to be conducted through computer and camera after you know this?” (Interviewee No. 17).

Other firms, such as an oil company, adopt a mixed recruitment model. Due to the particularity of some positions, the candidates need to be interviewed face-to-face to check their physical capabilities and health. Moreover, for some positions, the candidates are selected based on their performances in an examination that is held at the company to avoid cheating and ensure fairness. The HR manager from an oil company highlighted:

“We have adopted different recruitment methods for different positions. Jobs such as office positions and some senior executives are usually completed through the paperless recruitment model you mentioned, which is basically through email and telephone contact. However, for some positions, the candidates need to undertake relevant examinations before they can be hired. To ensure the fairness of the examination, we did not choose an online examination but still conducted it offline. Maybe in the future, we will change the examination to online mode, as the online invigilation system is becoming more and more advanced. However, this will also increase the cost of system maintenance, so we may still prefer offline examination mode for a while. As an offshore oil company, we have many offshore jobs with certain requirements on employees’ physical fitness and physique. Therefore, we often conduct face-to-face interviews for recruitment of this type of job, mainly to determine whether the physical conditions of candidates are up to standard.” (Interviewee No. 13).

The above discussion suggests three main barriers to implementing paperless recruitment. One is the lack of technical knowledge in the workforce, such as how to use computers. The second barrier is the particularity of some recruitment requirements; some jobs cannot avoid face-to-face interviews, offline examinations, or essential paperwork. The last barrier is the costs associated with implementing paperless recruitment. If it reduces costs and saves time, companies are willing to adopt it. However, if it requires the installation of new systems, which entails initial investment and maintenance costs, the firm may be reluctant to adopt it.

4.2. Green Candidate Recruitment

The interviewees’ response to green candidate recruitment was relatively unfavourable as compared to paperless recruitment. Only the four neighbouring community committees and non-profit organisations consider the candidates’ former environmental performance when recruiting people. When recruiting, they would ask candidates to describe their previous environmental behaviours and views on environmental protection. One leader of a neighbouring community committee said during the interview:

“When assessing candidates, we will give them one hour to write a specific article on environmental protection, usually giving them a case of the environmental protection problems that will arise in the community and letting them answer in an article within a limited time. In addition, for students who have just graduated from university, we will also specifically ask them in the interview whether they have been volunteers related to environmental protection during their college years. This is mainly because, currently, our community has a lot of tasks related to environmental protection, such as garbage classification, covering construction waste with environmental protection nets, dust control, and so on. So, we have reason to believe that employees with good environmental awareness can better carry out their work in the future.” (Interviewee No. 3).

Regarding for-profit firms, they seldom regarded the candidate’s green behaviours as important when deciding whether or not to recruit the candidate. Only one HR manager mentioned that for some sales positions related to new energy stock portfolio, the candidates were required to have some green initiatives and environmental knowledge:

“We have some environmental protection-related requirements for recruiting sales positions for mutual funds. Since the whole society is paying more and more attention to corporate social responsibility and environmental protection, our fund managers will launch many stock portfolio packages of new energy companies and other companies with high CSR and environmental protection themes, even if the current profitability and future development prospects of these companies don’t perform outstandingly in the market. Therefore, we need our fund salespersons to promote these fund products by stressing environmental protection themes to meet the psychological needs of some individual investors.” (Interviewee No. 7).

The other 15 companies were found to be doing very little for green candidate recruitment. Nevertheless, the reasons they gave for being reluctant to conduct green candidate

recruitment varied. One CEO from an investment bank felt that most investment banks' recruiting criteria were mainly based on the candidate's educational background and professional certificates:

"Unfortunately, when we recruit employees, we hardly mention any questions related to environmental protection to the candidates. We are a financial company, and our corporate culture is "profit first". Therefore, we pay more attention to the candidates' education and certificates, such as CFA, CPA, and ACCA. As you know, the salary in the financial industry is very high, so the competition is intense as well. There are often dozens of people applying for one position. If we consider environmental protection and neglect their financial expertise, we will lose more than we gain. But this does not mean that our company does not consider environmental protection. We regularly invite related professors to give our employees lectures on environmental protection." (Interviewee No. 8).

Similar opinions also came from the leader of a start-up AI company, who felt that his firm's business operations had little impact on the environment and, therefore, cared only about the candidates' professional skills in programming and computing:

"We are a company that conducts research on artificial intelligence (AI) and is an asset-light enterprise. The fixed assets in my company are only offices and computers. The only environmental protection behaviour we can ask employees to do is to turn off their computers during their non-working hours, but this is common sense. We have labelled "Please turn off your computer after work" on each employee's desk. Therefore, I don't think our company needs to consider candidates' environmental protection knowledge when selecting employees. [...] Yes, as an AI company, we run a lot of large programs and codes and consume a lot of electricity every day. But it is unrealistic for you to optimise the power consumption of the computer. Unlike some truck or taxi drivers, they can use their driving experience to switch proper gears and choose fast routes to reduce fuel consumption. When the computer is running, we can hardly do anything to control its power consumption." (Interviewee No. 11).

Other companies found it difficult to operationalise the concept of a 'green candidate' and impossible to evaluate the candidate's greenness in practice in the current stage. Several interviewees in industries such as energy and food prefer environmental training upon induction or on the job rather than recruiting a "green candidate". The following quote comes from an HR manager of an oil company:

"What is a green employee? To tell the truth, it is hard to make a verdict because, currently, there is no authoritative certificate related to environmental protection granted to individuals in China. I'm afraid the only evidence that can convince me is that your green behaviour has been published in newspapers or the news, but it can hardly happen. You can't regard the candidate as an environmentalist because of his own statement. There are too many big talkers now. Of course, We hope that our employees have a good awareness of environmental protection because this is in line with China's current policies and national conditions. But we are a profitable enterprise and pay more attention to candidates' internship experience or work experience. In addition, we have our own environmental protection-related training, especially for those job positions that may affect the environment, and we also have the corresponding assessment. Therefore, we have confidence that our employees will not damage the environment." (Interviewee No. 14).

The owner of one restaurant held the same view on the difficulty in quantifying the green behaviour of the candidate. In addition, he believed that even if the candidate really had performed a good deal of activities related to environmental protection, the candidate's previous understanding of green behaviour might not be in line with the restaurant's requirements for a green job. He also believed green training and supervision could play a greater role than recruitment:

"As a restaurant, the most important thing is food hygiene and safety. No one wants to see food poison happen. Candidates may turn off the lights regularly and not litter trash on the ground, but this is much easier than they are required to do in their work. Every step

of food processing has strict hygiene indicators. Some steps need to be disinfected within a minimum period of time, and some need to be cleaned again and again several times. To save time, some employees will be lazy and will not do what is required. Personally, I think this involves a sense of responsibility, not just their environmental initiative. Therefore, we have a strict training and performance management system for our restaurant; [...] whether a candidate who has not joined the company is environmental protection or not is not important.” (Interviewee No. 18).

The above discussion shows that most firms are pessimistic about adopting green candidate recruitment and reveals several barriers. First, the senior executives’ green engagement is insufficient. Companies like the AI company in this study believe there is little need for internal environmental protection within the company. The second barrier is that it is difficult to determine whether the candidate is green just through the candidate’s CV or words. There is no well-developed evaluation system or criteria or an authoritative ‘green individual’ certification system. The last and the most prominent barrier is the utilitarian or profit orientation. For for-profit organisations, their priority remains to be profit maximisation. Indeed, HR managers are primarily concerned about the candidate’s educational background, work experience, and future benefits to the company rather than their green credentials. This utilitarian orientation may explain why senior executives’ green engagement is insufficient.

5. Discussion

Overall, six barriers to the adoption of GRS were found. Three of them are aligned with the findings of the existing literature. The first one is the lack of top management commitment. The neglect of GRS by senior management has led HR managers not to consider environmental factors in the recruitment process; this is in line with Sathasivam and Abu Bakar’s [44] finding that HR managers do have many chances to communicate with senior executives on environmental sustainability issues. The second barrier is the financial cost. Some paperless recruitment may involve installing new systems, requiring initial investment and maintenance costs, which may cause the firm to be reluctant to carry on the GRS practice [47,48]. The third barrier is the low effectiveness of evaluating whether the employee is green or not. Until now, there is still a lack of widely recognised certificates that can assist HR managers in hiring “green candidates”. Previous studies have also mentioned there is a need for an effective model to evaluate whether employees are environmentally friendly or not [23].

In addition to the three barriers already discussed in the previous literature, three new barriers are identified in this study that have not been reported in previous research but may hinder the firm from acquiring new green human capital. The first is the lack of technical knowledge, which is a result of some specific industries hiring employees with lower educational levels. The second is the special requirement of certain jobs, which forces employees to be interviewed face to face. These two barriers can be merged into one factor, which is “the alignment between the job profile and green practices”. If the expected educational levels are relatively low and the candidates do not have computer proficiency, then the job profile is not aligned with paperless recruitment. If the job responsibilities include green activities, such as environmental management and green product design, promotion, and marketing, then the job profile is aligned with green practices and recruitment.

The third new barrier, which is the second factor, is profit orientation. Compared to the for-profit firms, the four non-profit organisations fully adopted paperless recruitment and green candidate recruitment. GRS adoption is more associated with benefits rather than barriers. Non-profit organisations are to provide public goods, such as managing and protecting the local environment, rather than making a profit. For for-profit firms, managers pay no attention to green candidate recruitment and have no intention of investing resources to develop a green candidate evaluation system if they cannot gain any short-term profit from it.

The above finding also extends Rayner and Morgan's [26] viewpoint that the degree of GHRM implementation is not decided by whether the industry is environmentally polluted or not. Instead, this study finds that the degree of GRS adoption is related to the profit orientation of the firm; compared to for-profit organisations, non-profit organisations in this study were more willing to adopt GRS. Furthermore, for for-profit firms, if there is a good alignment between job profiles and green practices, the firm would be happy to adopt GRS because they benefit from it. Otherwise, the firm would be reluctant to adopt GRS as the misalignment constitutes a barrier.

As such, the two factors can be combined to formulate a proposition of GRS adoption alignment: when an organisation's profit orientation and job profiles are aligned with green practices, it would be happy to adopt GRS. One example would be firms that generate profits by making, promoting, and selling green products; their profit orientation is aligned with green practices. This green profit orientation makes it necessary that green product design, marketing, and sales personnel need to have green knowledge and take green initiatives. As such, the job profiles would be aligned with green practices as well. This alignment would encourage these firms to adopt GRS. Similarly, for non-profit organisations that provide public services and public goods, their mission is to protect the environment and public interests. Their profit orientation, job profiles, and green practices are also aligned with a motivation to adopt of GRS.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

This research aims to answer the question that previous research has neglected: what are the "challenges in recruiting green talent employees" [21]? This study examines the practices and barriers to GRS in the context of China. It takes a qualitative and inductive approach, exploring the experiences and opinions of senior managers in Chinese organisations on the two components of GRS: paperless recruitment and recruiting green candidates.

GRS adoption is beneficial in some Chinese organisations. Nevertheless, the interviewed managers only mentioned short-term and practical benefits, such as saving time and costs. They did not mention any long-term or strategic benefits, such as improving employee satisfaction or building a green reputation. This is perhaps not surprising as strategic benefits cannot be observed immediately or directly. However, a lack of long-term perspective may indicate that these strategic benefits could not achieve their potential to encourage GRS adoption.

More specifically, this paper shows two new factors underlying GRS adoption and its barriers in Chinese organisations: one is the alignment between the job profile and green practices, and the other is profit orientation. Profit orientation is very similar to financial resources as a barrier, which is widely discussed in the GHRM literature [22,41,47]. Financial resources as a barrier mean firms are reluctant to invest in GHRM systems and practices. Profit orientation indicates that for-profit organisations prioritise profit-making over green practices and, thus, are unwilling to invest to facilitate GRS adoption and practices. However, the alignment between the job profile and green practices has not been discussed in the GHRM literature.

As such, the two factors can be combined into a broad proposition of GRS adoption alignment: when an organisation's profit orientation, job profiles and green practices are aligned, it would be happy to adopt GRS. Apart from making a theoretical contribution and advancing the understanding of GRS adoption, this proposition also has practical implications. The alignment encourages organisations, whether for-profit or non-profit, to adopt GRS. Nevertheless, for-profit organisations are likely to align job profiles with profit-making. To promote GRS adoption, the key is to align profit-making with green practices. In other words, if green practices are rewarded with greater profits, organisations would be motivated to adopt GRS, and costs will no longer be a barrier. This is the case related to green stock sales, which indicates that the market or government policies can create the condition to reward green practices. Without such rewards, it may be challenging for for-profit organisations to adopt GRS.

Furthermore, based on the two factors mentioned above, the finding also extends Rayner and Morgan's [26] viewpoint that GHRM practice adoption can be different based on industry types. However, the degree of GHRM practice implementation is not determined by the pollution level of the firm, but by whether the enterprise is profit-oriented and whether the job profiles and green practices are aligned. Non-profit companies are comparatively more willing to implement GRS practices. If only comparing for-profit companies, the more alignment between the job profile and green practices, the more likely the firm will adopt GRS practices.

7. Limitation and Future Direction

This study also has several potential limitations. First, green HRM practices vary between firms, industries, and economies [25]. Although the interviewees chosen in this study come from different industries, both for-profit and non-profit organisations, some popular industries in the GHRM area, the medical sector [64], and higher education institutions [65] were not included due to limited resources. In future research, the scope can be expanded to include a wider variety of industries. Second, the explorative nature of this research means that the sample is relatively small and not representative. In future research, a quantitative approach can be adopted to test the alignment proposition developed in this paper. Finally, this research was based in China only. Future research can benefit from a cross-cultural research design and comparative studies on GRS adoption in different cultures and countries.

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