

## **Sustainability of Work Force and Employee Development**

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### **Abstract**

The evolution of human race from the discovery of fire and invention of wheel to the invention of internet and space technologies has been a long journey and is marked with various transitions, collaborations, coming together of different minds, finding newer ways, optimizing, enhancing etc. The entire human race today is linked and involved together in direct or indirect ways, with everyone having its own share of responsibilities towards the society at large.

A very large section of human race is employed and the income as paid work is the primary source of income for the masses. If job quality is improved, it can influence the well being of people across the globe and have defining impact in shaping up the future of mankind.

Employers and Human resource managers keep trying to ensure that the people who work for their organization are the best fit for the job and can give maximum output. This is possible if the work force is sustainable, and their constant development is taken care off. Rapid changes in technology, social and demographic transformation, focus on green transition to combat climate change, and impact of Covid 19 with some long lasting implications are changing the way work is being done, the purpose of work and also the location of job. The changes have both challenges and opportunities.

Increase in inequality of wages, impact on mental wellbeing, increasing need for re skilling and up skilling is some of the major challenges of the changes in the paid work ecosystem. HR leaders across the globe are talking about a new vision for good work. Managers at all levels need to think alike to make the new vision for good work a reality. This will help the organization on different fronts like employee engagement, work engagement, productivity, consistent attendance, retention. Business enterprise must step up and own responsibility to comprehend governments plan to make jobs better. This will make the whole world a better place.

Keywords: Sustainable work force, employee engagement, well being,

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## **Introduction**

The core objective of any organisation is to create value (economic, social, well being) and stay relevant in the long run. Capital investment and expansion decisions are made accordingly to be ready for future requirements and market demand. On a similar note sustainability of work force needs to be implemented in letter and spirit by organizations to ensure that current and future employees realize their true potential and improve their quality of life.

Sustainability is the ability to maintain and retain something to a certain level. Sustainability is about having a long term vision about environment, society, and governance, and finding solutions accordingly. It is about choosing long term and sometimes the more expensive option over short term option. As mentioned by Ellen Kossek, Monique Valcour, and Pamela Lirio in the book *Work and Wellbeing: A Complete Reference Guide*, A sustainable workforce is one where the work environment is caring and supports employee wellbeing. Employees are not seen as primarily resources that can be deployed (depleted) to serve employers economic ends. Their skills, talent and energies are not overused or overly depleted. They are neither faced with excessive workload nor with a relentless pace of work for weeks or years on end. During times of crisis (e.g., sickness, natural disasters) employees are given time to recover or seek the extra resources they need to be able to perform in the future.

Sustainability of workforce in an organization is about nurturing their future leaders, managers, and employees by working on their skill development and investing in their well-being. Sustainability of workforce promotes better efficiency and enables employees to be more creative and innovative. Sustainable human resource management practices develop positive social relationships at work,

which further aids in enhancing business performance by improving team work, knowledge sharing, commitment to organisational goals, and striving for success.

The nature of work and work environment keep changing as new trends evolve. Technological change, social and demographic change, climate change and green transition, and most recently effects of COVID19 are some key recent trends which have defined the work environment. Technological change brought people from field to cabin and from cabin to 24x7 availability. Entry of women and people with disability into organisations is a social change which changed the demographic quotient of organization. Green transition is leading to change in the nature of job and also the number of jobs. Covid too had major impact of the way and location of work.

There is great need for the organization to work on workforce sustainability. Sustainable human resource practice develops positive social relationships at work which enhance business performance, resilience, knowledge sharing, collaborative capacity.

### **Objective:**

Sustainability of workforce is something that organisations cannot keep away from. Sooner or later workforce sustainability has to become part of the organisations culture and vision.

The main aim of this study is to identify the essential elements for workforce sustainability, so that the policies of organizations can be drafted on the line of sustainability.

### **Methods and Methodology:**

Exploratory research method was used for the study. The study was done on the basis of secondary data available on different source. Informal discussions with industry professionals and academics in different fields of study related to workforce development were initially conducted.

### **Finding:**

The concept of workforce sustainability is new to most of the industries. Very frequent changing market trends depending on technology, government policies, climate change, green transition, and natural calamities leads to very frequent change in work-style of the workforce. Impact of COVID 19 pandemic has fastened the impact of some of these changes. Today the employees are reassessing on what they expect from their work and whether they want to work at all in their respective organization. One example of this shift of mindset is the “Great Resignation” (WEF,

2022). As many employer and employees are seeking the new normal, there is an opportunity to develop new vision for the future of work depending on the new social- norms and economy.

Like digital skills, sustainability skills and jobs will be the next area companies are expected to invest in. That includes a variety of capabilities such as diversity and inclusion, corporate social responsibility, green building, sustainability reporting, supply chain management, and carbon foot printing.

#### Description of workforce sustainability

Lippe and Lippényi (2019) stated that a workforce is sustainable when members of the workforce are productive and satisfied in their work environment. In this regard, Kossek et al. (2014) found that a sustainable workforce can be “created and nurtured via employment practices [policies and procedures] that link employee work-life balance and well-being to employment experiences over the course of employees’ working lives, enabling them to perform well over time while also thriving in their personal and family lives.”

Workforce sustainability is defined as “a property of a workforce that reflects the extent to which the work force can perform its desired function over a selected period of time” (Gambatese et al. 2019).

The World Happiness Report (2017), a landmark survey to rank people’s happiness in different countries, recognizes the role employment plays in determining one’s overall happiness. According to the report, attributes such as nurturing, diversity, and equity are key determinants of employee happiness.

The three levels of components are attributes, indicators, and metrics, respectively (Karakhan etal, 2020). Attributes: Foundational qualities and characteristics contributing to construction workforce sustainability; Indicators: Practices, procedures, and policies that reveal the presence of each attribute within the workforce, and which can be used to assess and improve each attribute and, as a result, the overall level of workforce sustainability; and Metrics: Measurement units and scales used to assess the extent towich the practices, procedures, and policies (i.e., indicators) are actually implemented in practice within an organization to sustain the workforce.

As per Karakhan etal(2020). The attributes of workforce sustainability are nurturing, diversity, equity, health and well-being, connectivity, value, community, and maturity.

Nurturing is the extent to which employees feel supported, educated, and trained in their work. Diversity is the extent to which the workforce is diversified, and members of the workforce feel welcome and accepted.

Equity is the extent to which employees feel that they are treated and evaluated fairly without any discrimination. Health and well-being is the level of health, safety, and contentment that employees feel and experience in their work.

Connectivity is the degree to which employees feel connected to peers, fellow employees, and management through open channels and two-way communication. Value is the extent to which employees feel respected and appreciated by peers and by their employer for their work performance, contributions, and loyalty.

Community is the extent to which employees feel camaraderie and see themselves as part of a supportive and productive team. Maturity is the extent to which members of the workforce are competent, responsible toward each other, and share accountability in decision-making and problem-solving.

Employee development through sustainable workforce practices:

It is important that a new benchmark is set with respect to the job quality which can ensure a sustainable workforce scenario amidst the emerging trends at workplace and its associated challenges and opportunities. The new benchmark must ensure that the employees' economical, health and well being, and social aspects are taken care off.

Employees can be more productive if the job remuneration enables them to meet their basic economic requirements, the work environment provides them with flexibility to maintain work-life balance, their health and well being is not compromised, their skill is constantly upgraded to enable them to meet new demands at workplace, and they feel part of society even at workplace.

The above key elements required to set a new benchmark can be divided into five objectives (a) Promote fairness on wages, (b) promote flexibility of workplace and time, (c) promote employee health and well being, (d) promote learning and upskilling, and (e) promote diversity, equality, and inclusion.

- (a) **Promote fairness on wages:** With the increasing cost of living across the globe, minimum wage alone does not provide enough to live with dignity and meet the needs of self and family. This forces many people to look for alternate earning opportunities. It is time that

organisations should consider to ensure that their employees are paid at least living wages. Equal pay for equal work irrespective of the gender and ethnic characteristics should be followed as well.

- (b) **Promote flexibility of workplace and time:** Hybrid or Flexible work culture is about providing option to employees to choose their work location (office or remote) and work timing. Working from home and working within flexible time are the most common trends especially since the pandemic. Experts see that further extension to this trend will be job sharing (where two employees share full-time role), part-time job, annualised and compressed working hours, phased retirement etc. Such flexibility allow employees to reduce commute time and have more time for self and family which can be invested in personal well-being. Remote working also helps to reduce travel cost and expense on child and adult care. Organisations also benefit from such policies as it reduces office expense. HR leaders are required to clearly define how they will create a fair and equitable workplace for all employees regardless of location and schedule, and communicate how leaders will manage employee they never physically see. Greater flexibility is becoming huge perk to attract new talent.
- (c) **Promote employee health and well being:** Employees are under a lot of physical and mental stress to cope up with the work pressure in today's highly competitive world. They are expected to exhibit resilience, i.e successfully adopt or adjust to change (or misfortune) and thus need to be flexible in mental, emotional, and behavioural aspect. The health of employees is a critical aspect for any organisation as a lot of people are diagnosed with work related depression which affects productivity and engagement. Employee well-being is all about caring for employees' work life as well as their personal lives. The concept of employee well-being is gradually shifting to being an opportunity for employer's to support their employees by making a healthy organisation than just limited to caring about physical health of employee by providing work place safety and health insurance. Well-being now spreads beyond physical well-being and also includes financial well-being, mental health well-being, social well-being, and career well-being.
- (d) **Promote learning and up-skilling:** Times are changing in terms of requirement for job. Automation, digitization, and green transition require workforce to learn new skills. Skill based eligibility is taking place of degree or qualification based eligibility. Besides hiring

candidates with in-demand skill, organisations are also focusing on skill building of their existing employees to improve their competitive edge. Organizations map the internal skills that their employees possess and accordingly make systematic plan for their up skilling and re-skilling by investing in training workshops, certification programs, imparting practical skills depending on the need of the employee and demand for the job that they perform. Organisations tend to make their employees more efficient and productive in the competitive environment and thus build skill pool and succeed in a labour market and competitive economy.

- (e) **Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI):** Having a diverse workforce one which is gender diverse, ethnic diverse, diverse in nationality, diverse in physical capabilities, diversion in financial status is important to have a good pool of talented manpower and is a competitive advantage as it enlarges the overall skill and capability of an organisation. Hiring a diverse workforce is the first step, equity and inclusion are subsequent steps and more critical ones. Creating an atmosphere of treating the diverse workforce as equal is what HR managers must ponder upon. If the culture of equal treatment and equal opportunity e.g equal pay for equal work irrespective of the gender, for all is missing in an organisation, it makes hiring and retention of talented manpower difficult, besides also resulting in loss of revenue due to loss of productivity, high turnover rate, and absenteeism. It is also important that an inclusive workforce culture is inculcated in an organisation. The ideas and perspective of everyone should be listed to and the contribution of everyone should be recognised rather than valuing only few belonging to a certain group. Research has shown many benefits of a diverse and inclusive workplace like higher revenue growth, innovation at work, increased ability to recruit a talent pool and higher employee retention

The key elements and their goals can be summarised as follows:

Objectives	Core goals	Expected goals
Promote fairness on wages and technology	Ensure at least a living wages for all.	Workers should have representations. Besides technology and artificial intelligence should not reduce jobs. They should assist in getting work

		done.
Provide flexibility and protection	Enable all workers to benefit from flexibility	Work life balance for employees. Cost saving and time saving for both employee and employer.
Deliver on health and well-being	Safe guard total well-being at work	Work environment should provide physical and psychological safety. Workers must find purpose in their work and should be made to feel their value. Excessive burnout and work break must be monitored for every worker.
Foster employability & learning culture	Provide accessible up skilling and re skilling for the entire workforce	Continues learning mechanism for workers should be in place.  Recruitment plan should incorporate skill requirement for immediate work and future requirements.
Drive diversity, equity & inclusion	Workforce profile should reflect the operating market	Equal pay for equal work and inclusive culture should be built. Leadership structure should speak for diversity and inclusion of the organization.

Table no.1

Source: World

Economic Forum

### **Conclusion**

Human Resource Management began as a new department created within business organizations in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century to take care of harsh (and criticized) working conditions and resolve disputes between management and union has become an important pillar in today's business ecosystem. There has been a tremendous change in the field of HR and from being a support function; it has become a competitive advantage. The rise of service sector brought many changes in the way HR operates in organizations. With time a completely new generation of employees get active in the workforce and there is a shift in the requirements and priority of the employees. Organizations have



to adapt to these changes to keep their employees engaged. This adaptability of organizations to the changes in preference of current and future employees is what defines the innovative trends in HR. The adaptability cannot be short term but needs to be sustainable.

The good work framework is currently the answer to the requirement of sustainable workforce. The adoption of good work framework will provide organisations with the opportunity to access their existing HR practices and redesign the HR processes and work practices across all functions. The adoption of good work framework can be successful if the leadership has a human centric approach, adoption of relevant and required technological system for sustainable workforce is undertaken, and there is a proper metric system to monitor the changes of adoption of the good work framework through increased reporting.

Leadership at all levels of management need to ensure that good work is adopted. Some specific behaviour from leadership like being available and accessible, being open to inputs, encouraging learning from failures can help to develop a perception of psychological safety. There is lot of big data at work, besides flexible working requires collaborative tools. Organisations have internal chatbots for assistance of employees. Use of technology to provide employees with a combination of digital tools, data, and analytics to enable them to be more productive and agile is something that must be done to ensure a good work culture. Developing proper metrics for measuring the impact of implementation of processes for good work across length and breadth of the organisation is critical. Data related to good work should be captured and monitored to assess the impact of good work processes. Transparency and accountability needs to be inbuilt in the whole scheme of things to ensure successful adoption of good work framework. The ultimate aim of developing a workforce sustainability model is to ensure that basic needs and development needs of the employees are met and their well being is considered as priority for the organisation. This ultimately results in increase in Employee Engagement as employees relate better to the organisation and are physically, mentally, and emotionally connected to their organisation.

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