



Decent Work and Employee Wellbeing – The future of work for Economic growth and Sustainable development

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ABSTRACT

In the recent times, the pandemic has affected the world severely in terms of quality of life, political, environmental, economic sustainable development, and the global economy. The ILO has developed an agenda for the community of work called the Decent Work Agenda, which strives to achieve decent work for all. The year 2020 started the ‘Decade for Action’ on achieving the 17 SDGs launched by the UN Agenda 2030. The 17 goals are the global blueprint to end poverty, protect our planet, and ensure prosperity. Prior to pandemic, the Global Commission on the Economy and Climate, had concluded that strong action has the potential to generate over 65 million new jobs by 2030, deliver at least \$26 trillion in net global economic benefits, and avoid 700,000 premature deaths from air pollution. The Global Commission on Adaptation estimated that investing \$1.8 trillion globally from 2020 to 2030 in resilience building measures could generate \$7.1 trillion in total new benefits and the focus was on creating decent work for sustainable economic growth.

Decent work sums up the aspirations of people in their working lives. Productive employment and decent work are key elements to achieving a fair globalization and poverty reduction. The ILO has developed an agenda for the community of work looking at job creation, rights at work, social protection and social dialogue, with gender equality as a crosscutting objective. Unsafe work environments have severe consequences for both workers and their employers. The ILO has estimated that 2.3 million workers die every year from work-

related injuries and diseases. A further 160 million workers suffer from work-related diseases, and 313 million workers experience non-fatal injuries each year. Negative economic consequences add to the damaging effects of unsafe work environments on human health and wellbeing. The workforce of the future has identified a culture of health as a key factor in career decisions, and investors are increasingly aware that good health is smart business. Today, it is inevitable that leaders need to respond to these calls by being deliberate in their intent to contribute to a healthier workforce. By embracing employee health and well-being as a pivotal piece of sustainable growth strategy, organizations can better able to create a resilient, agile workforce that's well-positioned for the future.

Most of the research on sustainability has a business-to-consumer focus, with limited emphasize on sustainability in the context of understanding employee wellbeing. Thus, this paper focuses on understanding decent work and economic growth, through the intersection of sustainability and employee wellbeing at workplace.

KEYWORDS:

Decent work, economic growth, sustainability, pandemic, employee wellbeing.

“Decent Work and Employee Wellbeing – The future of work for Economic growth and Sustainable development”

“Everything we do during and after this crisis [COVID-19] must be with a strong focus on building more equal, inclusive and sustainable economies and societies that are more resilient in the face of pandemics, climate change, and the many other global challenges we face”.

By António GUTERRES, Secretary-General of the United Nations

1. INTRODUCTION

The 2030 agenda for ‘Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)’ was implemented in 2016 by United Nations; in ensuring peace, prosperity and opportunity for all & for well-being of the masses; and to end all kinds of deprivation and socio-economic evils including poverty and inequality. The agenda enlisted 17 SDGs with 169 Targets, which are the milestones of holistic

socio-economic transformation, having priority focus on well-being of people and planet earth at large. As a global mandate, the SDGs cover three key dimensions of sustainable development viz., (a) economic growth, (b) social inclusion and (c) environmental protection: which are closely interconnected and inevitable, as a part of well-being of the individuals, communities, nations and world development.

Sustainable business and economic growth is the key competitive advantage in the twenty-first century world. In the past two decades, sustainability has become an essential aspect of a firm's strategy. Most large global firms have a statement of social purpose, and many firms have signed the UN Global Compact and support its Sustainable Development Goals (Young & Reeves, 1987).

According to Davos there is a pressure to disclose progress on environmental, social, and governance metrics, as well as climate response (Davos, 2020). According to the information from "The evolution of sustainable development theory: types, goals, and research prospects" (Shi, 2019), the research emphasise that the theory of Sustainability has gone through three periods: the embryonic period (before 1972), the moulding period (1972–1987), and the developing period (1987–present). In the meantime, the concept of sustainability is continuously evolving from pursuing the single goal of natural resource sustainability to 'Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals'.

As (Spiliakos 2018) mentioned in "the effect business has on environment" and "the effect business has on society," the goal of a sustainable business strategy is to make a positive impact on at least one of the areas. When companies fail to assume responsibility, the opposite can happen, leading to issues like environmental degradation, inequality, and social injustice". The sustainable management of people, process and product is always a difficult task and firms should install a sustainable architecture to get the best out of both "mind-share" and "market-share" philosophy (Singh, 2018b).

Thus, Sustainability is fast becoming fashionable in strategic management has come a long way, yet its meaning is often elusive. It has become a strategic concern driven by market forces. Today, more than 90 percent of CEOs state that sustainability is important to their company's success, and companies develop sustainability strategies for their advantage. Leaders and

managers across industry are engaged in developing organizational sustainable capabilities through fundamental changes in the organizational processes.

Over the last 50 years, there has been a considerable research associated with sustainability related matters. Initial studies of the subject were typically directed towards understanding environmental sustainability. However, research into the field has evolved over time and is now incorporating various sustainability aspects away from simply environmental issues. The problem is that the research does not seem to be achieving the long-term sustainability goals.

Sustainability has run through our society, economy, and throughout our lifetimes. But the pandemic has impacted the economy, society, geopolitical, environment, technology, industry, human behaviour, human mentality, all significant suffering destruction, and reset.

2. SUSTAINABILITY AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

Many studies attempted to research and define sustainability. Some were limited in their view of what the term means while others showed that the term can only be explained by looking at many interconnected aspects which together, define the meaning of sustainability. For instance, Operations Management literature tends to consider sustainability from an ecological perspective without incorporation the social aspects of sustainability (Sarkis, 2001; Hill, 2001; Daily and Huang, 2001). Other studies such as Carter & Rogers (2008) looked at sustainability from the economic, social and environmental aspects while incorporating the business aspects of risk management, transparency, strategy and culture. The research found differing sustainability definitions depending on the aspects that authors attempted to study.

Recently, the term is being used to discuss the integration between the social, environmental and economic aspects of sustainability. “Sustainability is development that meets the need of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” The first phase of business sustainability, at the University of Michigan’s Erb Institute call “enterprise integration,” is founded on a model of business responding to market shifts to increase competitive positioning by integrating sustainability into pre-existing business considerations. By contrast, the next phase of business sustainability, what we call “market transformation,” is founded on a model of business transforming the market. Instead of waiting

for a market shift to create incentives for sustainable practices, companies are creating those shifts to enable new forms of business sustainability. Instead of tinkering around the edges of the market with new products and services, business must now transform it.

Enterprise integration is geared toward present-day measures of success; market transformation will help companies create tomorrow's measures. The first is focused on reducing unsustainability; the second is focused on creating sustainability. The first attends to symptoms; the second attends to causes. The first focuses primarily inward toward the health and vitality of the organization; the second expands that focus to look outward toward the health and vitality of the market and society in which the organization operates. The first will help future leaders get a job in today's marketplace; the second will help them develop a target for a lifelong career. The first is incremental, the second transformational. Changing the way we do business is essential to addressing the challenges of economic growth and sustainability.

Hence sustained and inclusive economic growth is a prerequisite for sustainable development, which can contribute to improved livelihoods for people around the world. Economic growth can lead to new and better employment opportunities and provide greater economic security for all.

3. 17 INDICATORS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND GROWTH

The UN has defined 12 *Targets* and 17 *Indicators* for SDG 8. Targets specify the goals and Indicators represent the metrics by which the world aims to track whether these Targets are achieved.

The 17 SDGs are represented in **Table 1** and the policy outcomes from these indicators are: Better jobs , International labour relations, Social protection floors, Sustainable enterprises, Rural economy, Informal economy , Labour inspection, Unacceptable forms of work , Labour migration, Employer's and worker's organization.

Table 1: SDGs and Integrated Development
(# Degree of Linkage: Scale 3 = Highest, 2 = Moderate and 1 = Lowest)

SDG #	Thrust /Focus area of SDG	Description of the SDGs	Linked with HR #
SDG 1	No poverty	End poverty in all its forms everywhere	

SDG 2	Zero hunger	End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture	
SDG 3	Good health and well-being	Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.	
SDG 4	Quality of education	Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all	
SDG 5	Gender equality	Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls	
SDG 6	Clean water and sanitation	Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all	
SDG 7	Affordable and clean energy	Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all	
SDG 8	Decent work and economic growth	Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all	Yes (3)
SDG 9	Industry, innovation and infrastructure	Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation	
SDG 10	Reduced inequalities	Reduce inequality within and among countries	
SDG 11	Sustainable cities and communities	Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable	
SDG 12	Responsible consumption and production	Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns	
SDG 13	Climate action	Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts	
SDG 14	Life below water	Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development	
SDG 15	Life on land	Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss	
SDG 16	Peace, justice and strong institutions	Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels	
SDG 17	Partnership for the goals	Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development	

4. ILO 2030 AGENDAGOAL 8 – DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aim to encourage sustained economic growth by achieving higher levels of productivity and through technological innovation. Decent work is one of 17 Global Goals that make up the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. An integrated approach is crucial for progress across the multiple goals. Making decent work and employee wellbeing matter within the SDGs.

Goal 8 of the SDGs, to 'promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all' is an ambitious, yet lesser-known aim within the Global Goals agenda. It represents a crucial departure from the idea that safeguarding employees, and their well-being in the work environment, in some way acts as an economic ball and chain on business, national and global development. Nurturing employee well-being has a social and economic imperative and is a precondition to achieving Goal 8 on Economic Growth and Decent Work, as well as contributing towards progress on good health and well-being (goal 3), gender equality (goal 5) and reduced inequalities (goal 10).

SDG 8 offers a framework for countries to implement a mixture of policies aimed at promoting growth and Productivity without harming the environment and generating decent work that respects core labour rights as an effective pathway to inclusive growth. It seeks to achieve higher economic productivity and job creation through diversification and innovations in technology, while at the same time protecting labour rights and promoting a safe and secure working environment. Despite gains in human development, narrowing gap of per capita income between high-and lower-income countries and improvements in labour productivity, only limited success has been achieved globally on most of the SDG 8 targets. Challenges, such as improving access to financial services and resource efficiency in consumption, increasing employment opportunities, especially for the young workforce, reducing informal employment, labour market inequalities, gender discrimination, and promoting safe and secure working environment; persist across countries.

The effects of individual wellbeing is based on Quality of Working life, failing to which has an impact at Business and National level. At Business level, it's the lower productivity,

declining mental and physical health, increased absenteeism, more rapid staff turnover, inferior service of its workforce, and thereby reducing its profitability via decreases in staff efficiency.

At the National level, higher rates of short-term absenteeism and possible frictional unemployment, reducing government tax revenue and increasing net borrowing to maintain the same level of spending on public services, growing levels of crime, greater demand for health services due to deteriorating mental and physical health, a poor quality work environment is a major driver behind the migration of highly educated and skilled labour away from their country.

5. GLOBAL GOALS IN BUSINESS- EMPLOYEE WELLBEING

The ‘Global Goals’ simply cannot be achieved without businesses. Through their core operations, financial commitments, employee networks, consumer-facing platforms and high-level influence, companies have a crucial role to play in accelerating progress towards the Goals. Every business and every employee can make a vital contribution to creating a more peaceful, equitable and prosperous future.

5.1. PRIORITIES FOR ACTION – EMPLOYEE WELLBEING & WELLNESS AT WORKPLACE

While it may be difficult to predict the future of the workplace as new technologies and trends take shape, there is one thing of which the organizations can be certain: the future workplace should be a workplace supporting the employee physical and mental health, focusing on employee wellbeing. Wellness is an active process of becoming aware of and making choices toward a healthy and fulfilling life.

During the past decade, there has been a concerned shift of attention to workplace wellbeing strategies. Organizations must thus prioritize wellness in the workplace as it supports developing and adopting a framework that is grounded in compassion, holistic wellness, meaningful interactions, and flexibility helps Organizations, to create a workplace culture

driven by empathy and focused on holistic employee well-being, gain a competitive advantage and explore creative solutions to support the workforce effectively.

5.1.1. **Engaging Employees to Create a Sustainable Business:** The key to creating a vibrant and sustainable business is to find ways to get all employees from top executives to assembly line workers, personally engaged in day-to-day corporate sustainability efforts.

5.1.2. **Co-create Sustainable Practices with Employees:** Another important way of embedding sustainability in a company is to engage employees in the co-creation of sustainable practices.

5.1.3. **Encourage Employees to Participate In Workplace Wellness and Wellbeing Programs:**

Wellness is the process of becoming aware of and practicing healthy choices to create a more successful & balanced life. Employee wellness programs are a great way to attract top talent, keep employees happy and productive and decrease employee turnover. An employee wellness program for their wellbeing is more than just a cool employee perk. It's an effective way to ensure the employees are in the right shape to do their best work.

The components of wellbeing are Physical, Psychological, Intellectual, Social, Financial, Occupational, Environmental and Spiritual. Today, organizations are waking up to the potential benefits of employee wellbeing programs through nutrition and healthy living, encourage wellness initiatives through recognition and rewards programs, promote and reward healthy eating habits, assess ergonomics, incentivize smoking cessation, help combat eye strain, on-site yoga classes to relieve stress, fitness activities, general health benefits, mental health & stress-release activities, social activities, community service activities, team building activities, create active workstation and more.

The main reason for this raising interest is the established link between health and performance in the work place.

5.1.4. **When increasing their focus on workplace wellbeing:**

It can be hard to see the advantages of an employee wellness program at first glance. But the truth is healthy employees bring an array of benefits to the businesses they work for.

The general hypothesis is that the healthier and happier people are, the more productive they are in the work place. It leads to better employee morale and engagement, a healthier and more inclusive culture, lower sickness absence, more productive employees, less office stress, less colds, flu and other illnesses, fewer office-related injuries and happier employees.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This paper has analysed all the 17 SDGs, and especially the SDG-8 in relation to the EMPLOYEE WELLBEING & WELLNESS AT WORKPLACE along with ILO provisions. It has been found that this aspect is critically important in the current changed scenario, in the post-COVID scenario and evolving work models.

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