

Investigating the Relationship between Work Engagement and Sustainable Development: A Review of Literature

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Abstract

The paper is aimed to explore and study the relationship between work engagement and sustainable development. With the growing diversity of the workforce and enterprises entering new markets, it is more critical than ever for businesses to keep their employees engaged in order to retain top talent thereby helping an organization in sustainability. Organizational sustainability is described as a company's capacity to meet a variety of financial, environmental, and human performance goals. Employees that are engaged with their work are more likely to be content with their positions that have a significant impact on quality, effectiveness, work efficiency and in particular lowering expenses that ultimately leads to lower turnover rates and a competitive advantage for the company and contributing to sustainable development over the time. Since engaged individuals have a positive attitude toward their job and are typically profoundly dedicated to it, they may be anticipated to do their responsibilities more competently, resulting in improved individual or group performance as well as a strong basis for organizational sustainability. The approach of the study taken is an extensive literature review in fields of engagement and sustainable development, with a focus on some of the broad assumptions and assertions in those literatures.

Keywords: *Work Engagement, Sustainable Development, Sustainability, Employees, Organizational Sustainability.*

Introduction:

Sustainable development as an area of research has been gaining importance in the past few decades. The research into this field entered the official parlance after the United Nations Brunt land Commission Report focused on the present and future aspects of sustainable development. There are four interlinked dimensions to sustainable development- society, environment, culture and economy. The United Nations also defines 17 sustainable development goals including poverty, zero hunger, good health, quality education, climate action amongst others. The overarching outlook usually looks at sustainable development through the lens of social, environmental aspects with international organisations and governments being at the helm of affairs. Thus, we find sustainable development being clichéd to connote environmental problems associated with human activity.

In the business arena, the sustainable development goals are much more specific and focused, something that often converges with the corporate social responsibility⁴ and triple

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⁴ The term corporate social responsibility (CSR) refers to all policies and practice that an organisation may conduct to pursue societal objectives.

bottom line¹. Contrary to the concept of profit focus as advocated by Adam Smith. The new business environment has obligations to society, environment and its own employees including a sort of philanthropic approach. Ironically, employee focus has remained relatively neglected both in practical instances and as an area of research. One reason for this may be the conflicting expectations of different stakeholders, the shareholders, management, employees, government or society. In many instances, the interests of the employees are secondary to the interest of other groups, the consequence of which is lack of work engagement, job dissatisfaction and a subsequent high turnover intention. Researchers have spent a lot of time studying and understanding the concept of work engagement as a result of the good effects it has had on firms. In view of this research, businesses are beginning to pay more attention to giving their workers with the tools and resources they need to become more engaged in their jobs.

In light of these observations the present paper prioritises employees with work engagement as the focal point of sustainable development goals in an organisation. The paper is organised as follows. Section 2 give a brief theoretical background of our major variables of interest, the sustainable development and work engagement. Section 3 provides an extensive review of literature and section 4 concludes the paper.

Theoretical Background:

Work Engagement:

"The harnessing of organisation members' identities to their work roles; through engagement, people utilise and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances," states (W. A. Kahn, 1990). Work engagement's cognitive component is concerned with employees' perceptions of the organisation, its leaders, and working circumstances. Employees' feelings regarding each of those three criteria, as well as whether they have favourable or negative views about the organisation and its leaders are addressed in the emotional aspect. The physical part of work engagement refers to the actual efforts made by employees to carry out their responsibilities. Kahn's theory was expanded upon by Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, and Bakker (2002), who defined engagement at work as "a pleasant, rewarding, job-related state of mind marked by vitality, devotion, and immersion" (p. 74). Employee/work engagement is a phrase that is used interchangeably to describe an overall construct that includes physical, cognitive, and emotional factors. According to (William A. Kahn, 2017), being psychologically as well as physically present when occupying and performing an organisational job is what engagement entails.

Work engagement is commonly characterised as employees' emotional and intellectual commitment to the company (Baumruk 2004, Richman 2006, and Shaw 2005) or the amount of discretionary effort they put in at work (Frank et al 2004). Despite the fact that work engagement is a multi-faceted construct, as Kahn (1990) suggested, Truss et al (2006) define it simply as 'passion for work,' a psychological state that is seen to encompass the three dimensions of engagement discussed by Kahn (1990) and captures the common theme running through all of these definitions.

Bakker and Demerouti (2007) added to the work engagement research stream by introducing the JD-R model, which includes the notions of job demands and job/personal resources as antecedents to work engagement. Personal resources refer to an individual's perception of his or her ability to successfully control and influence circumstances; job resources refer to job-related attributes that positively influence an employee's work

¹ Triple bottom line includes the objectives of profit, people and planet.

achievement, physical and psychological well-being, and learning and growth; and job resources refer to job-related attributes that positively influence an employee's work achievement, physical and psychological well-being, and learning and growth (Hobfoll, 2001). Job demands, on the other hand, refer to job-related features that necessitate a major physical and psychological commitment and, if too great, might stifle performance (Hakanen & Roodt, 2010).

Sustainable Development:

The growth of the notion of sustainability is often overlooked and forgotten. Sustainable development is commonly thought to be a new development model that originated in the late twentieth century, yet the notion of sustainable development dates back for further. Although the history and growth of a notion may appear irrelevant, it may assist us in predicting future trends and problems. It will also assist us in making the twenty-first century "the Sustainability Century" (Elkington, 1997, p.18). The International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) presented the World Conservation Strategy (WCS) in 1980, with the "overall goal of attaining sustainable development via the conservation of living resources" (IUCN, 1980). "By recognising Sustainable Development as the core objective of society, the WCS were able to make a substantial contribution toward reconciling the interests of the development community with those of the people," critics admitted. The notion of sustainable development is widely agreed upon among sustainability experts and practitioners (Giddings et al., 2002). The terms "sustainable development," "sustainability," and "sustainable" have been over- and/or misused by several stakeholders in society, individuals, and groups as contemporary buzzwords, prompted by an increase in public awareness and concern over environmental and social issues (Sneddon et al. 2006). "Development that fulfils current demands without jeopardising future generations' ability to satisfy their own needs" is the definition of sustainable development (UN, 1987). Sustainable development has a broad appeal and limited definition, although many efforts to define it include some mix of development, environment, and equity. Proponents of sustainable development, on the other hand, disagree in their emphasis on what should be sustained, what should be developed, how to integrate environment and development, and for how long. Organizations in the era of sustainable development may seldom tackle sustainability concerns without considering the natural environment (Hart & Dowell, 2011). Resources and capabilities that promote environmentally sustainable economic activity, according to NRBV theory, are a source of competitive advantage (Hart, 1995).

SD theory, which focuses on the coordinated development of economy, society, and environment, first appeared in the 1980s and has since risen to the top of the political agenda. SD theory has now become an important aspect of government and corporate agendas. Sustainable development goals have become an integral element of the missions of research institutes all around the world (Bettencourt et al. 2011). Sustainable development incorporates traditional development goals while also include an essential environmental goal. As a result, the concept's novelty and uniqueness should not be overstated, as is sometimes done in the literature, papers, and by environmentalists (Zaccai, E. 2002).

The capacity of a company to contribute to "sustainable development by concurrently generating economic, social, and environmental benefits—the so-called triple bottom line" is characterised as Organisational sustainability (Hart et al. 2003). To put it another way, sustainable companies are capable of achieving economic, environmental, and human performance all at the same time. Although all three aspects must be examined in their whole, the social dimension of organisational sustainability is frequently overlooked in favour of the economic and environmental elements.

Relationship between Work Engagement and Sustainable Development:

Sustainable Development Goal 8 emphasises the need of decent work for everyone in attaining sustainable development. This goal strives to “promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all”. The new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development includes components such as decent work, job creation, social protection, workplace rights, and social discourse. Furthermore, several of the other 16 objectives have important parts of decent employment woven into them.

Organizational sustainability is defined as the processes that generate social health and improve the well-being of organisational employees. The social dimension (i.e., human dimension) of sustainability is defined as the processes that generate social health and improve the well-being of organisational employees (Florea et al. 2013). Although the human dimension may have a wide range of components (e.g., equity, philanthropy, and work engagement), given that one of the most important mechanisms for understanding the human dimension of sustainability is the ability for employees to thrive or be engaged at work, employee engagement at work could be considered a core component of the human dimension of organisational sustainability (Kleinberg, J., 2003).

“The world has an employee engagement issue”, according to a new Gallup survey, with substantial and perhaps enduring ramifications for the global economy. Why do only 32% of U.S. employees say they are enthusiastic about and committed to their work, while only 13% of employees worldwide say they are engaged? With so many organisations focusing on employee engagement, why do only 32% of U.S. employees say they are enthusiastic about and committed to their work? This is where work engagement comes into force and has a role to play. One of the causes has to do with the reason for the trip. The key to developing an engaged and productive staff, according to management experts, is to provide purpose. We'd all prefer our working life to have a greater purpose than just showing up and making money and this is where sustainability comes in. Companies that prioritise sustainable practises can alleviate the conflict that exists between people's personal beliefs and their employment by giving a greater purpose. Thus legal requirements, employee engagement, career progression, company image, and performance management systems are the most significant aspects of a human resource strategy.

Ehnert& Harry (2012) outlined three 'waves of study' in Sustainable HRM in an attempt to construct an overview of the evolution of Sustainable HRM scholarship. S-HRM was originally studied in nations like Germany, Switzerland and Australia and offered the first definitions of the construct. S-HRM is defined by Zaugg, Blum & Thom (2001) as "long-term socially and economically efficient employee recruitment, development, retention, and dis-employment" During this initial 'wave,' most definitions centred on long-term labour systems that took into consideration economic, environmental, and social factors. A second 'wave' of research connected sustainability and HRM more comprehensively and provided additional insights by connecting the concept of sustainability with various HR issues, such as studies on a sustainable human resource strategy to mitigate the negative impact of downsizing decisions, sustainability as a new paradigm for HRM and talent management, the importance of human sustainability, and a stakeholder theory approach to S-HRM (Boudreau et al., 2005). Interdisciplinary studies that focus on a larger understanding of HRM's position in relation to a societal discussion of sustainable development make up the third 'wave' of publications (Kramar, R., 2014). Most research during this time period, according to Ehnert& Harry (2012) omitted to thoroughly study several elements of sustainability at the same time. Instead, opposing ideas emerged, such as Green HRM, which promotes environmental sustainability while accepting the supremacy of optimising economic performance, and

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Socially Responsible HRM, which emphasises social sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR). Hence third 'wave' is the new concept and is thus related to my approach regarding work engagement's link with sustainability.

The second option combines sustainability ideas into HRM procedures. Gollan (2000) created one of the first studies to establish the sustainability idea in HRM, stating that organisational sustainability must be founded on employee appreciation, recognition, and growth. It is quite likely that a company will lose its skills if these challenges are not addressed. This wave stems from the requirement for motivated and healthy workers. An organisation should take steps to enhance occupational health and safety, reduce and avoid stress, correctly modify the workforce to meet goals, establish ergonomic working conditions for employee well-being, and promote work-life balance. This will help in generating engagement levels at work in employees thus reducing turnover intention among them and also contributing to the sustainability and thereby help in development of a sustainable future for organizations.

Conclusion

In the work engagement sector, this study has tried to make a concentrated effort to emphasize on the importance of organisational sustainability and concentrate on the link between engagement and sustainable development. Organizations may establish dynamic capacity by creating, restructuring, and integrating their skills to thrive in the dynamic market, using human resources as a foundation for long-term competitive advantage (Teece et al., 1997). In order to fulfil their business goals, an increasing number of firms have taken proactive measures to address difficulties arising from fast globalisation, highly competitive marketplaces, on-going organisational transformation, and talent retention.

Work engagement, in this case, has been demonstrated to have a strong and positive association with income growth, stock price, individual job performance, and an organization's overall financial performance (Kim et al. 2013). That is, because engaged employees have a positive attitude toward their work and are often deeply committed to it, they may be expected to perform their tasks more competently, resulting in improved individual or group performance as well as a strong foundation for organisational sustainability.

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