SIMPLIFIED INSIGHTS ON SUSTAINABLE HRM

SHWETA TRIPATHI *

Research Scholar, Department of Commerce, Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi- Delhi.
Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce, Maitreyi College, University of Delhi.
*Corresponding Author Email: stripathi@maitreyi.du.ac.in

Dr. POOJA TALWAR

Associate Professor, Department of Commerce, Shaheed Bhagat Singh College, University of Delhi.
Email: pooja.talwar@sbs.du.ac.in

SHAIFALI

Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce, Maitreyi College, University of Delhi.
Email: skashyap@maitreyi.du.ac.in

Dr. RITIKA CHAUDHARY

Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce, Shaheed Bhagat Singh Evening College, University of Delhi
Email: cs.ritikachaudhary@gmail.com

Abstract

The concept of sustainability is gaining attention in the HR field, and it's influencing the creation of a sustainable HRM approach to employees. However, experts have paid very little attention towards attainment of sustainability goals through human resources of the organisation. Despite the current spike in interest of scholars in this area, the literature on the subject is scattered and varied. The study is primarily descriptive in nature and primarily focuses on presenting the concept of sustainable HRM in a simplified way. Based on extant literature this study provides DePrins' model of sustainable HRM and dimensions of sustainable HRM. This study details five dimensions of Sustainable HRM: justice and equality, sustainable HR practices, profitability dimension, employee well-being and workplace spirituality. In addition, the paper contributes to the existing literature by outlining direction for further research in the area of sustainable human resource management. Finally, the report offers suggestions for HR strategies for sustainable organisations that could be fruitful.

Keywords: HRM Practices; Equity; Justice; Sustainability; Sustainable HRM; Sustainable HRM Dimensions; Workplace Spirituality.

INTRODUCTION

Both developing and developed countries are already experiencing the severe effects of the climate crisis. These repercussions are not sector-specific, and all industries are in jeopardy.

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's Sixth Assessment Report, extreme weather events such as droughts, pluvial and river floods, hurricanes, extreme weather events, bushfires, and acidification of the oceans are becoming more common and severe (IPCC-AR6). To avoid a terrible and irreversible outcome by reducing the effects of climate change 196 countries pledged to reduce global GHG emissions. In 2015, the United States made a pledge as part of the Paris Agreement.

The COP26 is significant because participating countries pledged at COP21 in 2015 to reduce carbon emissions so as to keep global warming below 2 degrees Celsius and to make capital available to accomplish the goals of the Paris Agreement, which is a lawful obligation on climate change. Countries that agreed to cut emissions voluntarily set emissions reduction goals in their countrywide policies, known as "Nationally Determined Contributions" (NDCs), indicating how much emission is expected to be reduced each year through various green initiatives. Furthermore, every five years, the countries promised to review and publish their updated reduction strategies.

At the United Nations 26th convention on Climate Change, Prime Minister Narendra Modi unveiled a five-point strategy for India to assist the world get closer to 1.5 degrees Celsius (CoP26). Prime Minister Modi offered five nectar ingredients known as Panchamrita (PIB, 2021) to effectively deal with the climate challenge, which include the following undertakings by India:

1. By 2030, India's non-fossil energy output will be 500 gigawatts.

2. India plans to use renewable energy to meet 50% of its energy demands by 2030.

3. India intends to cut carbon emissions by one billion tonnes by 2030.

4. India's economy will have cut its carbon intensity by 45 percent by 2030.

5. India will reach net zero emissions by 2070.

Expectations to meet the above-mentioned commitments are more likely to be passed on to the Indian corporate sector's industries. Corporate social responsibility and sustainability are becoming more important to firms even today, and HR is in a better position to help with both the creation and implementation of a sustainability strategy. Now it's a right time that organizations should support environmental regulations in order for the globe to remain a pleasant place to live. Organizations can make a beneficial contribution to the maintenance of a cleaner and safer ecology by adopting a variety of important ecological activities. This straightforward theoretical article examines a measure taken by businesses to promote sustainable growth and environmental initiatives. Sustainable HRM requires that human resources departments should implement green and ecologically friendly practices into their businesses. Green HRM is a concept that expands on the fundamental understanding of this term.

Objectives of the study

As the concept of Sustainable HRM is very recent and still evolving, this paper seeks to attain following purpose:

1. To provide understanding of sustainable HRM concepts.

2. To provide understanding of DePrins' model of sustainable HRM.

3. To shed insight on the various aspects of sustainable HRM

4. To provide suggestions for a smooth transition to sustainable HRM.

METHODOLOGY

This study is primarily descriptive in nature. For information on the sustainable HRM concept dimensions, development, significance, and suggestions many sources such as websites, blogs, published material on sustainable HRM and related research articles were consulted, and due credit was provided at the end.

Sustainable Development Concept

These days the concept of sustainable development is gaining attention among policy makers, industry experts, consumers, and researchers. In the late twentieth century, the emergence of the notion of sustainable development may be linked to a growing awareness of impending ecological disaster. Sustainable development has its roots in the Brundtland Report. The Brundtland Commission defined sustainable development in 1987 as "action and development of organisations in such a way that, in meeting the needs of the present, they do not jeopardise future generations' ability to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987, p. 43). Elkington (1997) outlined the three pillars of sustainable development (named the Triple Bottom Line): concern for the environment (planet), concern for social equality (people), and concern for economic prosperity (profit). The term concern for the environment refers to an ecosystem's restricted ability for regeneration. Concern for economic prosperity refers to the improvement in standard of living obtained through efficiency in generation of output, while concern for social equity refers to the right of all stakeholders to access resources and the establishment of transparent interactions that emphasise the distribution of value creation. The concept of sustainability includes durable outcomes and inclusive growth of all stakeholders.

Sustainable Development was considered as a paradigm change in human resource management in the current era. It was because, in the past, human sustainability had been overlooked in some way (Pfeffer, 2010). Initially, organisations viewed sustainable development as either a new way to gain competitive advantage through strategic management or as an optional responsibility to incorporate stakeholder demands under the umbrella of CSR, both of which ultimately led to competitive advantage, and both were accomplished through HRM. (Boudreau and Ramstad, 2003). The time for Sustainable development has arrived. Environmental regulations should be supported in order for the globe to remain a pleasant place to live. Organizations can make a beneficial contribution to the maintenance of a cleaner and safer ecology by adopting a variety of important ecological activities.

Sustainable HRM

The Brundtland Report of the United Nations defined sustainable development as "development that meets the requirements of present generations without jeopardising future generations' ability to satisfy their own needs" (Brundtland, 1987, p. 41). Sustainable development necessitates taking into account the ecology, the industry, and society all at the same time. The majority of sustainability research has concentrated on environmental sustainability and has been related to corporate social responsibility initiatives, ignoring the social aspect.

The word "sustainable HRM" is a recent addition to the HR vocabulary. Because the field is still in its inception stage, there is no established definition for the idea. Ehnert (2009) describes sustainable HRM as "the pattern of planned or emerging human resource strategies and practices intended to enable organizational goal achievement while simultaneously reproducing the HR base" in her work on the subject (p. 74). Also, Kramar (2014, p. 1084) defines sustainable HRM as " the pattern of planned or emerging HR strategies and practices intended to enable the achievement of financial, social and ecological goals while simultaneously reproducing the HR base over a long term." According to Ehnert et al. (2014), sustainable HRM is a design strategy for the employment relationship as well as a contribution to long-term business development. Sustainable HRM is all about ensuring sustained availability of human resources through various HR practices that will assist organisations in attainment of sustainability goals. Thus, Sustainable HRM involves reproducing the HR base over a long period of time that is more sustainable and committed towards attainment of sustainability goals.

Harmon, et al. (2010) mentions that the HR department of organisation really does have the potential to play a important role in the development of the company's sustainability culture, but the HR function is still uneasy with the way its role is viewed in organisations, and conflicted about its ability to impact it (Cohen, 2010). The application of HR strategies to cultivate a workforce with the trust, ethics, abilities, and motivation required to produce a profitable triple bottom line can be viewed as Sustainable Human resource management Sustainability within the organisation will result in following benefits:

- Long-term prosperity and value generation
- Improved performance in terms of social, economic, and ecological goals.
- Enhancing a company's brand and image
- Increased accountability and greater transparency
- Improving employee and societal quality of life
- Increases staff trust and reliability

For financial, regulatory, or ethical reasons, HR plays a vital role in companies that embrace a sustainability strategy. As a result, HR should help with the creation and accomplishment of ecological and social goals while balancing these goals with conventional financial performance measures. Keeping this perspective in mind, an HR manager should play a key role in ensuring that workers adopt the strategy in a consistent manner across the organisation.

Review of Literature on Sustainable HRM

Sustainable Human Resource Management (HRM) has gained significant attention in recent years as organizations recognize the need to integrate environmental, social, and economic considerations into their HR practices. This review explores key themes and findings in the existing literature, shedding light on the evolving landscape of Sustainable HRM.

1. Conceptual Foundations of Sustainable HRM

Researchers (Jackson & Ruderman, 1999; Kramar, 2014) emphasize the importance of aligning HRM practices with sustainability goals. Sustainable HRM involves integrating environmental and social concerns into recruitment, training, and performance management processes. This aligns with the broader organizational strategy for sustainable development.

2. Linking HRM and Environmental Performance

Studies (Paillé et al., 2014; Renwick et al., 2013) have explored the impact of HRM practices on environmental performance. Findings suggest that environmentally conscious HR practices positively influence employees' eco-friendly behaviors and, consequently, contribute to overall organizational sustainability.

3. Strategic Integration of Sustainable HRM

Schuler and Jackson (1987) introduced the idea of strategic integration, emphasizing the need to align HRM strategies with business objectives. This concept is extended by Jackson et al. (2014), who propose an aspirational framework, highlighting the dynamic nature of Sustainable HRM and its potential to contribute to long-term organizational success.

4. Employee Reactions to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Research by Rupp et al. (2013) investigates the impact of CSR on employee attitudes and behaviors. Employees' perceptions of CSR initiatives influence their job satisfaction and commitment. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for organizations aiming to foster sustainability through positive employee engagement.

5. Organizational Responses to Environmental Demands

Delmas and Toffel (2008) delve into how organizations respond to environmental demands. Their study identifies a spectrum of responses, from reactive compliance to proactive strategic initiatives. The role of HRM in driving and supporting these responses is a key area for further exploration.

6. Challenges and Opportunities in Sustainable HRM

Boiral (2017) contributes to the literature by examining challenges and opportunities in the context of green bonds. The cost of debt is explored as an outcome of sustainable practices, raising questions about the financial implications of Sustainable HRM.

From conceptual foundations to practical implications, researchers highlight the need for strategic alignment, employee engagement, and proactive responses to environmental challenges.

DePrins' model of sustainable HRM

According to De Prins (2011) by establishing a clear connection between the firm's strategic plans and the environment, sustainable HRM aims to strike a balance between the usage and dignity of human capital inside a business. Human resource development requires long-term

planning and alignment with a company's strategic plans and CSR policy. She proposes four different approaches to the concept of sustainable HRM.

Sociological perspective- The sociological method tries to "socialize" human resource management practices. This type of human management is long-term in nature and seeks for consistency, with the employer's, employee's and society's interests all being explicitly linked. When placed into concrete terms, work engagement policies, health policies, and societal characteristics like diversity, age-consciousness, and family-friendly personnel policies are all useful themes.

Psychological perspective- The psychological approach is based on what issues are significant to employees. If people are at the core of the sustainability process then, De Prins (2011) argues that understanding and nurturing what motivates and distinguishes them is critical. Work-life harmony, flexibility, independence, self-growth, opportunities for growth, employability, and decision making participation are thus important topics in this approach.

Strategic perspective- HR techniques aimed at improving organisational performance as well as financial performance are included in the strategic perspective that also evaluates the efficacy of these initiatives (Boxall, Purcell, and Wright 2007). It has become the standard method of personnel management in large corporations. This perspective is in line with Friedman's belief that an organization's obligation should be to its owners rather than external stakeholders (Kramar, 2014).

Green Perspective- The fourth strategy is "green HRM," which focuses on how employees and management interact with the environment, which is a component of the triple bottom line. Encouraging green innovation, sustainability awareness training, encouraging ecologically conscious habits, and rewards based on sustainable practices.

Need for Sustainable HRM

1. Strategic HRM focussed on improving business outcomes or financial outcomes so as to improve the wealth of shareholders. In pursuit of improving business outcomes wellbeing of employee that was core purpose of HRM was completely ignored

2. Industries were experiencing High attrition rate and absenteeism rate.

3. Further due to ever deteriorating climate crises there was need to incorporate sustainable development goals with organisational goals

4. The principal issues of the time were an insufficient supply of finite resources, such as natural and human resources, as well as resource exploitation and consumption rather than development and reproduction.

5. Skill Obsolescence due to technological changes

Dimensions of Sustainable HRM

According to SDG Index 2021, three Nordic countries that top the index are Finland, Sweden, and Denmark whereas the ranking for India stood at 120. The SDG Index is a ranking of each country's overall performance on the 17 SDGs, with each Goal given equal weight. Here is an opportunity for Indian corporations to learn lessons from other countries that are performing well on attainment of sustainable development goals. Jarlstrom, Saru, and Vanhala (2016) put efforts to conduct qualitative study in Finland to develop understanding on the concept of sustainable HRM from the perspective of top managers in Finland. HR Barometer developed by Finnish Association of Human resource management was used to capture descriptive responses of top managers on sustainable HRM.

In their study they identified four dimensions of sustainable HRM as: Justice and Equity, Fair HR practices, Holistic thinking, and Well-being of employees. Besides this we also propose one more dimension of workplace spirituality. .

Justice and Equity: Justice and equity part of sustainable HRM involves those areas that relate to compliance with existing laws, promoting and managing diversity, ethical principles, and managers' exemplary behaviour. Adherence to national laws and regulations is regarded as the minimal standard for responsible and sustainable human resource management. As a result, adhering to institutional rules does not always imply that a company is long-term viable. Besides following the law, the function of collective bargaining is a key component of HRM sustainability wherein unions have got a significant role to play.

Furthermore, it is vital to value diversity and ensure that personnel at all levels of the organisation are treated equally. Treating employees with justice and fairness implies that the rules, obligations, and rights should be the same for everyone in the firm. As a result, equity and fair treatment provides the basis to develop the concept and definition of Sustainable HRM.

The managers regarded themselves as role models in their own behaviour. As a result, the only way available for managers to develop feelings of fairness and equality among employees is to model them through their own actions. That implies if you expect your staff to follow a green mode of transport for commuting to office then you must do the same.

Promoting ethical thinking among employees of an organization is necessary in furtherance of justice and equity. It is essential to adopt ethical practices in any situation where management is making judgments under duress. Jarlstrom, Saru, and Vanhala (2016) find that management of Finland companies invest in leadership to ensure that their organization's leadership is of the highest calibre. Further, they give due consideration to demands of both employees and the company.

Sustainable HR Practices- Employees of the organization are going to play a significant role in attaining sustainable goals that mainly includes economic, social and environmental goals. Top management must understand that HR executives do not "work in a vacuum" if firms are to successfully adopt sustainability policies. First it is necessary to ensure sustainability within the organisation for an organisation to become a sustainable organization. Only when an

organization is a sustainable organisation internally it can be said to be contributing towards Sustainable development goals.

The transparent HR practices dimension covers aspects that relate to recruiting and resource distribution, development of available talent, compensating, career planning, employee participation, and flexibility practices (Jarlstrom, Saru, and Vanhala, 2016).

Recruitment and resource allocation requires best possible allocation of human resources (the appropriate person in the right job), as well as the long-term planning of human resource quality and quantity.

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Competence development and its management signifies that the company is concerned about skill development of its workers. Competence development is a critical component of the sustainability viewpoint since it not only keeps the business competitive, but it also keeps individual employees competitive in the job market. Managers will be able to deliver economic responsibility as a result of competency development.

Compensation system - A clear and sustainable compensation structure is critical. To ensure justice and equity rewards should be applicable equally to all employees, not just top management. The incentives and job tasks must be coordinated.

Career planning and development possibilities as offered by organizations can match the objectives and ambitions of employees in terms of their careers (Cao, Chen, & Song, 2013). Furthermore, firms are expected to provide the best and most promising available opportunities for career growth and advancement. This will restore employee enthusiasm, morale and reduce intention to quit (Lin, 2017).

Career planning is seen as a critical human resource strategy for retaining employees, and successful career planning is the most important component in preventing employee turnover (Jiang & Klein, 2002). That's why proper career planning was also cited as a dimension of sustainable HR management (Jarlstrom, Saru, and Vanhala, 2016).

Employee Participation – Encouraging employee participation and proper two-way open communication is an essential requirement to ensure availability of sustained human resources. Participation can aid in the development of a company's open communication culture. When employees are involved in the design and structure framework of their jobs, they are more likely to be satisfied. Further, it is necessary that all aspects related to communication, information sharing and organisational action should be made transparent. How HRM contributes towards CSR goals, in that employees participation has got a significant role to play.

Flexibility management employees' consideration for issues such as work hours, leaves, incentives, telework, holidays, and retirement by recognising the need for flexibility and ensuring work life balance. Organisations that provide more flexibility to assist employees

combine work and personal obligations will have a competitive advantage in the future. Flexibility in HRM can affect long-term sustainability by allowing employees to work longer and stay healthy.

Profitability - The profitability component of sustainable HRM, which is linked to organisational effectiveness, includes subjects such as HRM and strategy integration, proactive action, long-term planning, and HR managers' business knowledge. Long-term planning is an important part of long-term HRM (Ehnert 2009; Kramar 2014). HRM must assist strategy to create a relationship between HRM and strategic business goals, and HRM difficulties should be discussed early in the strategy creation process. In order to grasp the progress of sustainability, HR leaders must also gain a business understanding. HR leaders, in particular, may be able to improve the employer brand by increasing the visibility of the sustainability conversation in their organisations.

The significance of holistic thinking in sustainable human resource management, which involves an organisation's goals, mission, economic ability, and environment can't be overlooked. This approach emphasises HR managers' ability to play strategic partner role and contribute to an organization's overall social responsibility (Jamali et al., 2015)

Regardless of how HRM and strategy are combined, building sustainable strategies is a dynamic process that requires executives to exercise caution in order for the company to be adaptable.

This profitability aspect of HRM is associated to the economic aspect of sustainable HRM (Carroll 1991; Kramar 2014)

Employee Well Being

Employee well -being component of sustainable HRM involves showing respect towards employees and caring for them. This dimension also involves catering to emotional needs of employees such as safeguarding work relationships with supervisors and Co-workers besides physical well-being. Work–life balance, aging workforce, and the diverse requirements of employees at various phases of their careers are all factors that affect employee well-being (Kramar 2014)

Employees should be supported to manage working hours between professional and personal lives. Both mental and physical pressures should be addressed, and both should be minimised.

Jarlstrom, Saru, and Vanhala (2016) in their work emphasised that employee wellbeing and working conditions should be shared responsibility between the organisations and its employees.

Workplace Spirituality

The dominant corporate model, according to Zsolnai (2015), fosters self - interest, self-improvement, and a materialistic vision of man, resulting in a decline in social well-being and significant destruction of the environment. Researchers agree that materialism's domination, as shown in today's commercial milieu, encourages self-centeredness, which leads to ethically

irresponsible and insensitive behaviour toward societal demands. In organisational settings when materialistic mechanisms were applied, employees were found to be less likely to adopt citizenship behaviour.

Spirituality is defined as a connectedness to one's inner life and an understanding of universal ideals that goes beyond egoism and strengthens empathy for all living things (Zsolnai and Illes 2017). Workplace spirituality, according to Petchsawang and Ducho(2009), is defined as a feeling of connectedness to and compassion toward others, as well as experiencing thoughtful inner consciousness in the attainment of meaningful work that promotes spirituality. The term "workplace spirituality" is defined in a variety of ways, but all of them share the following characteristics:

1. Finding personal purpose and fulfilment at work,

2. Feeling connected to others, and

3. Being aligned with the workplace's ideals (Gatling et al. 2016).

Nowadays, it is thought that in order for companies to adapt to ever-increasing worldwide concerns related to sustainability issues, it is necessary that they develop a triple bottom line that contributes to the social and environmental benefits while earning profits which is impossible to do without taking spirituality into account (Stead and Stead 2014).

The majority of working hours for any employee are consumed at the workplace. Rather than considering employees as machines that give maximum results, there is a need to treat employees as living spirits with mind and soul. Organisations should be viewed as a place where employees' spirits can be nurtured. It is only through spiritual transformation at individual level and organisational level true spirituality can be attained.

According to Stead & Stead (2014), Sustainability has spiritual underpinnings. According to Afsar and Badir (2017), spirituality at the workplace contributes to sustainability by instilling a feeling of common, caring for others, caring for the earth, and propagating the concept that one's current actions will have an impact on society's future and future generations.

The focus of businesses swings away from attainment of financial goals in the short term to the organisations' long-term economic, social, and environmental performance as a result of sustainability (Boley and Uysal 2013).

According to Jukierwicz and Giacalone (2004), organisations that encouraged spirituality in the workplace grew more quickly, had greater rates of return, and increased their efficiency than organisations that did not. Individual level effects such as improved physical and mental health, advanced personal growth, and greater sense of self-worth have been linked to workplace spirituality, according to (Krahnke, Giacalone, and Jurkiewioz, 2003)

Suggestions to ensure smooth transition to sustainable HRM

Sustainability is something that cannot be ignored by Indian Corporates. Now there is a need to work in the direction of sustainability beyond the legal requirement prescribed for CSR. Where organisations look towards sustainable goals as their own obligation.

However, there is growing pressure to treat CSR as a business activity, with each programme expected to generate revenue. This puts too much pressure on CSR and diverts attention away from what it should be doing.

The goal of CSR activities is to match a company's social and environmental initiatives with its commercial purpose and values (Rangan, Chase, & Karim, 2015). Instead, most organisations take a multifaceted approach to CSR, ranging from pure philanthropy to environmental sustainability to the active pursuit of shared value.

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- For this there is need to build up sustainable culture within the organization

- Need to invest in employee development and capability

- Need to align rewards and incentives with sustainable practices.

- Organisation goals should be defined in line with sustainability goals.

- To increase the perceived presence of Sustainable HRM, CEOs and top management will understand that they must provide their HR departments with the necessary capabilities and resources for enabling and engaging people for sustainability (Rompa, 2011).

- To effectively contribute to sustainable reforms, SD policy should aspire for both minor, incremental successes and larger, more transformative wins.

- To embark on sustainability journey, HR professionals should develop understanding of sustainability standards specified by prominent global platforms   that includes: UN Environment Programme (UNEP), International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO), Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) and many others.

- Whatever standard or framework is chosen, the HR manager should assess and align all HR core functions such as employee, recruiting, and training opportunities development, workplace facilities, health, safety, and environmental protection well-being, remuneration, company culture, and communications. Alignment will be a part of the procedure. all aspects of the company's human resources infrastructure sustainably support new ways of working

HR plays a critical role in firms that embrace a sustainability strategy, whether for financial, regulatory, or ethical reasons. HR should assist in the formulation and achievement of environmental and social objectives while also balancing these goals with traditional financial performance measurements. In defining business values and a long-term plan, the HR department can be a key collaborator in evaluating what is required or doable.

HR should also play a crucial role in ensuring that the plan is carried out uniformly across the organisation. Human resource management (HRM) is described as the use of human resource practices to develop a workforce that possesses the trust, values, skills, and motivation necessary to produce a profitable triple bottom line.

CONCLUSION

As economies across the world prepare themselves to deal with twin crises of climate change and global pandemic. Organizations are also adapting to the various changes and challenges that both the crisis presents. Such a situation pushes businesses to look beyond their bottom line aims and outputs, as well as expanding their scope to encompass environmental and social objectives as well as outcomes. The GRI has emerged as the most widely used set of criteria for voluntary sustainability reporting.

As such, the GRI framework can be viewed as a guide to what should be done rather than just what should be documented. Responsible workplaces, human rights, safety procedures, labour regulations, performance development, diversity, employee compensation, and other HR-related activities that support sustainability are all covered under the GRI framework. HR may use the GRI's performance indicators to establish an initial plan and scorecard for its sustainability efforts.

Sustainable practices give people a new, energising perspective on the world, which can lead to creative solutions to a variety of business issues. Organisation must promote a system wherein individuals can enhance their unique abilities in areas that primarily contribute to social and environmental demands. In the process of attainment of sustainability goals, human resources in any organisation are the most important contributor.

Individuals must enhance their unique abilities in areas that primarily contribute to social and environmental demands in order for an organization's overall strategy, culture, systems, and structure to promote sustainable growth. Human resources are regarded as the most valuable asset in any business.

Human resources must be linked to achieve the organization's sustainability goals. Sustainable HR initiatives add value to potential employees and encourage long-term investment in their availability and viability, resulting in a high-quality, long-term workforce.

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