

Green HRM and the Gig Economy: Managing a Sustainable Workforce in a Changing World of Work

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ABSTRACT

The gig economy is an economic concept that is characterized by adaptable work schedules, where resources and labour are operated through digital platforms that link buyers and sellers. Adopting HRM methods and tactics that support the attainment of economic, social, and environmental objectives with an influence both inside and outside the company and over an extended period of time is known as sustainable HRM. This study explores how gig workers can be successfully managed and included into the larger organisational ecosystem with Sustainable Human Resource Management (SHRM). This paper examines how businesses could adapt their SHRM procedures to take account of the gig economy's benefits like worker flexibility and access to specialised talents, even though standard HRM models might not adequately handle the complexities of unpredictable employment. The research analyses the challenges and opportunities presented by integrating eco-friendly practices into the management of a diverse, distributed workforce. Key findings highlight the potential for innovative Green HRM approaches to enhance both environmental performance and worker well-being in the gig economy. The study concludes by proposing a framework for businesses to match their sustainability goals to unique characteristics related with gig work, contributing to the development of a more resilient and environmentally conscious labor market.

Keywords: Gig Economy, Sustainable jobs, Green HRM, Gig employment, Human-centered workforce.

INTRODUCTION:

The gig economy is evolving rapidly because modern consumers prefer more digital options when purchasing goods and services. Organizations now concentrate more on delivering timely services to clients with the help of flexible workforces. The way organisations handle human resources (HR) has changed significantly because of this shift towards non-standard work. Advancements in internet platforms, and growing employee preferences—which emphasise flexibility over traditional, full-time employment—are driving the autonomous sector. The gig economy has been fuelled by economic and technological innovations that are transforming human resource management. Decentralised workplaces, flexible work schedules, freelancing, and dynamic pricing patterns are examples of significant economic changes. Advances in technology, such as AI-driven hiring, digital HR tools, and virtual collaboration platforms, have made managing gig workers easier. Strategic workforce planning, regulatory compliance, and efforts to engage and retain gig workers are crucial considering these changes. HR departments must promote diversity and strike an alignment between adaptability and durability to adapt to a diverse workforce. The productivity and job satisfaction of gig workers are increased when they are integrated with technology. Businesses must implement these innovations to improve their HR practices to manage a diverse and geographically dispersed workforce. Maintaining a competitive edge in the market requires this adaptability.

Employees of contract firms, online platforms, independent contractors, temporary and on-call workers, and those who sign formal contracts to supply services to on-demand companies are all considered gig workers. Since gig workers are paid on an hourly basis, decisions need to be made quickly, and top-down methods used by many businesses will become outdated. Engaging with social media networks are taking the place of old working methods, and this new degree of peer cooperation and reciprocity will undoubtedly go against previous hierarchical structures.

Sustainable businesses view people as a vital component of the environment, where social advantages outweigh financial gain and the community may continue to exist both now and then in future. Sustainability's social pillar preserves equality among people, fosters community, helps in better management of resources. With the sustainable approach of regulating the functions helps in considerations of labour rights, equality regulations, HR managerial procedures, compensation practices, job security at profession, appropriate work life integration. Human resources management is the primary concern regarding maintaining the GIG economy's sustainability, particularly regarding the unstable working conditions made possible by the platforms used by GIG economy enterprises.

Organisations are depending more and more on freelance workers. In this changing environment, sustainable personnel management performs a critical function in meeting varying needs and lowering labour costs. The gig economy has special opportunities and challenges for sustainable human resource management. Because gig workers frequently lack benefits, job stability, and a defined career path, Green HRM methods need to be proactively revisited. The normative approach known as "human-centered HRM" contends that possibilities and challenges in the fields of economics, technology, society, and ecology should be addressed for the benefit of several stakeholders, including businesses, people, and larger societies. In a society marked by several major issues, including demographic shifts, digitalisation, globalisation, and climate change, it is a crucial method of putting the International Labour Organization's human-centered agenda for the future of work into practice.

On a global scale a new economic revolution is being ushered in by the fast-growing gig workforce. With the youngest population in the world, a half-billion-strong labour force, India is leading the way in this shift due to growing urbanisation and the pervasive usage of smartphones and related technology. This first-of-its-kind report provides comprehensive insights and recommendations on the gig-platform economy in India, which employs millions of people. People who labour for money outside of the traditional employer-employee relationship are known as gig workers, and they can be generally classified into two groups: platform-based workers and non-platform-based workers.

Those whose work relies on digital platforms or online software applications are known as platform workers. Non-platform gig workers typically work in traditional industries as own-account and casual wage workers, either freelance or full time.

Studying the differences between gig and traditional workers in greater detail, this study estimates gig and platform workers based on factors like location (in urban areas), mobile phone ownership, bank account access, age group (18–45 years), education level (from secondary school to graduation), and income level (workers whose household consumption spending is below the 75th percentile of monthly per capita consumption expenditure).

The flexible and independent sector is also transforming into a large growing area across country as several young, graduated professionals are connecting with significant worldwide autonomous platforms (Roy & Shrivastava, 2020). Aspects that have been examined from an economic perspective include the gig economy's capacity to generate employment, its magnitude, and its demand in various sectors.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Aslam & Khalid (2024) highlighted in his study that HRM is essential to maximising the workforce in the gig economy. Organisations can increase worker satisfaction and performance outcomes by modifying HR procedures to accommodate gig workers' particular needs. According to the research, it is critical to create HRM frameworks that are adaptable, responsive, and in line with the changing environment of jobs in the gig era.

Celestin & Vanitha (2023) highlighted the necessity for HR managers to develop creative approaches to hiring, retaining, and engaging gig workers to successfully integrate them into the workforce. Traditional HR management practices have undergone significant changes because of the gig revolution, and new methods are required to deal with the flexible and varied nature of gig work. The strong rise in gig workers, along with a noticeable shift from full-time to part-time and freelance roles, reflects a desire for flexibility and autonomy.

Sharan Prasad, R. (2023) examined research on Green HRM practices, which are designed to assist businesses in lowering their carbon footprint and putting eco-friendly policies into place.

Iancu, A. L., (2022) concluded that the application of the delivery sector necessitates particular guidelines and frameworks for every kind of GIG participant and, more importantly, their execution, taking into account route optimisation by fuel type and mode of transportation, promoting more ecologically friendly practices, and adapting to the physical capabilities of the workforce. The ICT-driven gig economy demonstrates how geography, distance, and geographical borders are becoming less relevant in the digital economy, and the gig economy and its twin notion, the platform economy, provide a number of unexplored study options investigated by (Malik, R., 2021).

Wikhamn defines sustainable HRM as “Effective talent management revolves around soft issues like showing genuine concern for workers, offering a respectable workplace, offering possibilities for growth, and paying attention to workers' physical and mental health while they are at work.” He emphasized on prioritizing employee well-being and providing a suitable organizational culture to employees where they get development opportunities for learning and growth. (Wikhamn, 2019)

Adopting HRM techniques and tactics that facilitate the attainment of economic, social, and environmental objectives with an influence both inside and outside the company and over an extended period while accounting for unforeseen side effects is known as sustainable HRM. (Ehnert et al., 2016)

As per Cambridge Dictionary (2020), the nature of work in the gig economy indicates “a way of working that is based on people having temporary jobs or doing separate pieces of work, each paid separately, rather than working for an employer”. Research study termed it as a new manifestation of Taylorism, gig work or micro tasking is the micro segmentation of the labour market based on extremely short-term activities. (Aloisi, 2015).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK ANALYSIS: GREEN HRM AND GIG ECONOMY

The conceptual framework represents the significance of sustainable practices in the gig sector by proper utilisation of opportunities and avoidance of the challenges that come across while effectively managing a sustainable gig workforce. This framework helps to explore the changing scenario of working with the rise of flexible work approaches.

The structure of the framework focuses on how sustainable HRM practices can be incorporated to match the need of unique characteristics of the autonomous economy. It proposed many green initiatives like green talent acquisition, diversified training and development opportunities and ethical concern of compensation to employees. It results in better employee well-being, increased employee job satisfaction, enhanced employee engagement and retention. It helps in integrating long term sustainability to all areas of gig workforce

management. It also helps to improve the organizational productivity and competitiveness in the evolving environment of business.

SUSTAINABLE HRM PRACTICES FOR GIG WORKERS:

1. Green Talent Acquisition: Aligning an organization's workforce with its environmental principles and objectives is known as "green talent acquisition. "Green talent acquisition is an initiative that help to integrate an organization-wide commitment to sustainability, which includes cultivating an environment-conscious workplace culture. It leads to create a positive work environment.

2. Diversified Training & Development: This function creates a learning environment which leads to employee engagement, improved learning outcomes and increased productivity of gig workers. It signifies a systematic approach for employees to learn and acknowledge specific skills as per their specialization.

3. Equitable & Ethical Compensation: It refers to a practice of paying the gig workers equally and fairly. This function mainly focuses on creating a compensation system that boost employee morale and motivation and organizational productivity. It also contributes in reducing the risk of legal issues in context of gig workers.

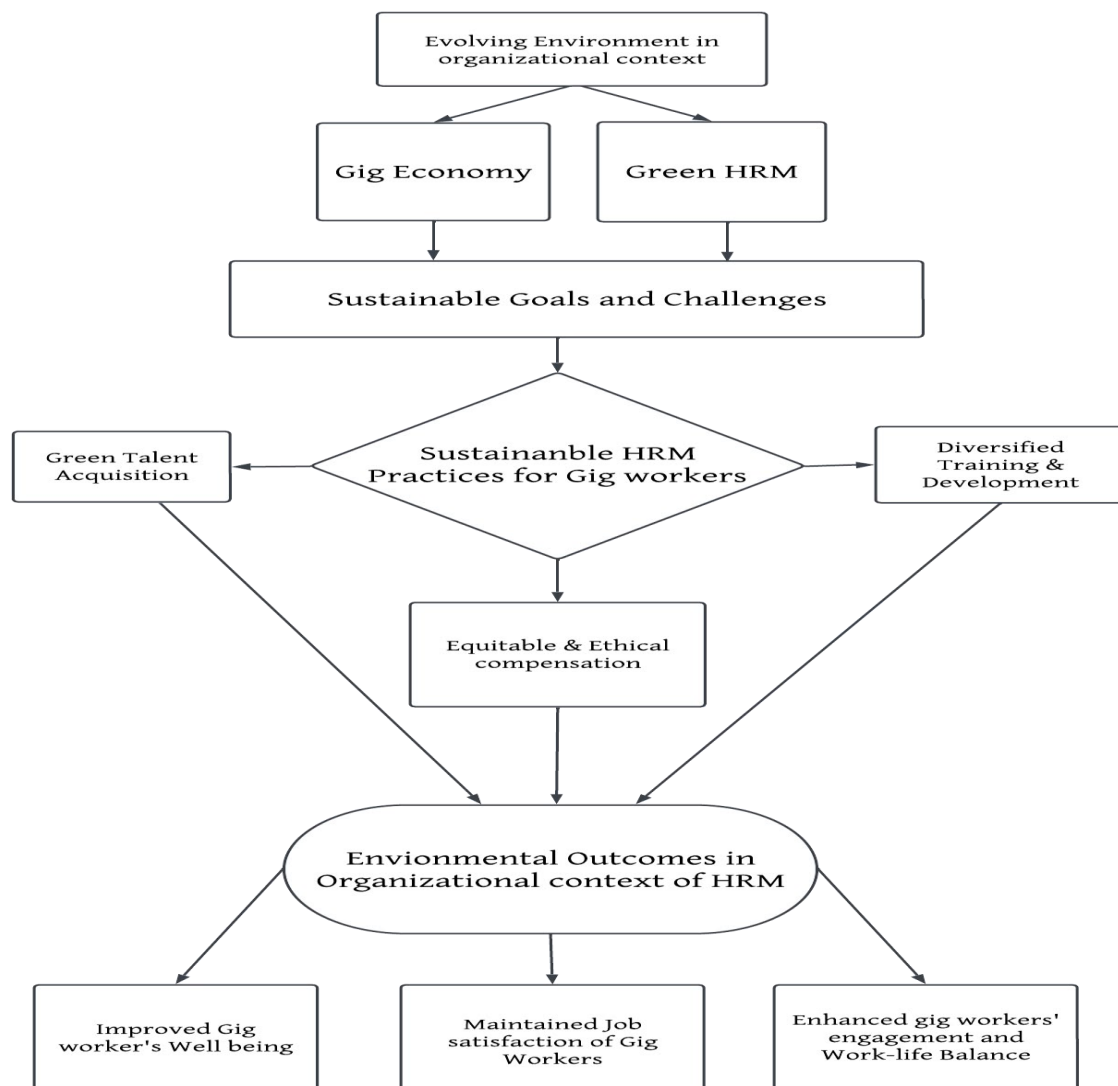


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Green HRM practices for gig workers

SUPPORTING ELEMENT TO FRAMEWORK:

Triple Bottom Line (TBL): This concept was proposed by John Elkington in the 1990s. Implementing procedures that do not endanger the environment's resources for future generations is part of TBL's environmental line. This includes the efficient use of energy resources, the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, and the minimisation of the ecological footprint. Environmental initiatives, like the social aspect of TBL, have an impact on the business sustainability of organisations.

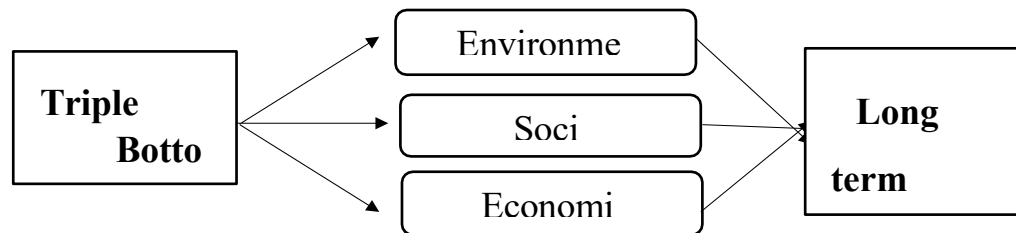


Figure: 2

Impact of triple bottom line on sustainability in context of gig economy with these three factors:

1. Environmental factor: This factor is associated with the term “Planet,” which emphasizes on the influence of business activities on ecological balance of the atmosphere. It measures the value created by organizations to maintain the sustainability and help to reduce the harmful practices of environment, for example utilization of electric vehicles, optimized routes to manage traffic, expert delivery partners to avoid accidents.

2. Social factor: Every worker is part of society. Hence, it is crucial for organisations to consider social values in their business practices. This factor is associated with the term “people,” which involves all the stakeholders of organisations, such as employees, customers, shareholders, vendors, etc. It also encourages the contribution of organisations in corporate social responsibility. This addresses health care facilities, stable income, maintain adequate relation with gig workers.

3. Economical factor: Every business activity is an economic function. Organisations operate with the objective of gaining profits. This factor explores the economic impact of organisations on creating more jobs and increasing the competitive advantage in market. This factor covers the bottom line of the variables like fair compensations, sustainable profit and revenue streams etc.

As triple bottom line, the framework for sustainability used in this paper for increasing the significance of people, planet, and profit. GHRM in the gig economy can be assessed using TBL principles, which serve as a framework for sustainable management. The triple bottom line's primary objective is to redirect the emphasis from short-term financial gains to long-term sustainable value creation.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To determine the sustainable possibilities and challenges faced by professionals in the gig sector.
- To evaluate the impacts of green HRM practices on gig workers' engagement and well-being.
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RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was a comprehensive and systematic study based on the secondary data collected from several research papers belong to national and international journals, published books and research articles, government reports which highlighted the importance of sustainable and flexible workforce.

Research Design

This research study is exploratory and descriptive quality research design in nature and aimed to explore the role of sustainable gig workforce from organizational point of view, with a particular emphasis on its digital platform work. The perspective of gig employees focuses on the gig sector's employment benefits and challenges.

Tools for Data collection

Data was collected through the secondary method of research with the help of a review of published literatures. Journals, articles, and qualitative papers were the main sources for understanding the implementation of sustainable practices in the context of the gig economy along with their opportunities and challenges.

IMPLICATIONS

This study helps to indulge the functions by which organisations can create a sense of generosity, thereby assuring that sustainability is not just a theoretical phenomenon but a tangible experience for these gig workers. This study is more concerned with the moral implications of gig work, ensuring that the accomplishment of sustainability goals does not compromise human dignity and equitable labour practices. This paper helps to better understand the effect of environmental, social, and economical factors on long term sustainability with the help of triple bottom line concept. It provides organizations a better approach to integrate the profitability with the productivity of gig workers and helps to maintain the well being and high morale of the time-based workforce. In this study, exploration of the human narratives and investigating how sustainable practices can promote community, enhance well-being, and establish a sense of belongingness in a work environment.

SUGGESTIONS

It is essential to adopt rules that offer social protection to gig workers. The concerns that accompany temporary employment can be significantly reduced with medical insurance, workplace safety, a clear payment plan, and job security, even if it is just temporary. Only if the interests of gig workers are safeguarded will be able to thrive. If the gig economy is to be integrated into a nation's economy and be sustainable, it needs to be more structured.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that sustainability is very essential for managing human resource. Specially, gig workers because of their nature of job, there may be higher chances of affecting the environment due to several challenges. Along with difficulties, many sustainable practices can transform it into suitable opportunities to excel in the field. Gig workers are the future of the work. As many young minds and graduates are more shifting to temporary world of work instead of working for fixed hours. It gives more autonomy and the gig economy presents many sustainable opportunities for gig workers, such as flexible work arrangements, access to global job postings, and working in areas of interest, but it also presents many challenges for gig workers, such as lower pay, a lack of social benefits, and job security.

Organizations can be advantageous from hiring gig workers at lower costs, less responsibility, and on-demand

talent, but organisations may also encounter several difficulties such as protecting data, information, and intellectual property rights when managing business operations sustainably. Triple bottom line is one of the appropriate approaches to interconnect the social, environmental, and economic factors to prioritize sustainable practices for the betterment of gig workers. This study summarizes that green HRM is true example of promoting the changing pattern of jobs in the context of gig sector. Through sustainable practices, HR professional can overcome the challenges and properly utilize the opportunities to develop the role of workers in gig economy.

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