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# Guest editorial: Advancing a sustainability perspective on HRD in India: organizational and individual level perspectives

## Introduction

With the advancement in the field of human resource development (HRD), emphasis on its contribution to organizational sustainability has gained greater attention (Srivastava and Shree, 2019; Yadav, 2019; Rimanoczy and Pearson, 2010). Scholars have proposed that HRD practices should go beyond a focus on the efficiency and performance of employees to support sustainable development. Research on the relationship between HRD and sustainability is scarce; however, conceptual models have sought to propose such a connection (Jang and Ardichvili, 2020; Ardichvili, 2012; Sheehan *et al.*, 2014). Scully-Russ (2012) used risk theory to propose that strategic, critical and holistic HRD can exist co-constructively with sustainability (Scully-Russ, 2012). She also proposed that with the shift in focus and efforts to connect HRD with sustainability, significant opportunities arise to enhance the field and bring a greater focus on sustainability issues. The incorporation of sustainability potentially can lead to the emergence of a new paradigm of HRD that can address major global societal issues.

Sustainability is a broad and less effectively defined concept. One such definition defines sustainability as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987, p. 8). It focuses on motivating organizations to work towards ensuring a healthier society, safer environment and stable economy, not only in the present but also for future generations (Srivastava *et al.*, 2020). Central to the notion of sustainability is the achievement of a balanced emphasis on three pillars i.e. economic, social and environmental elements (Purvis *et al.*, 2019). Sustainability is conceptualized as a multi-stakeholder approach that requires the active involvement of internal and external stakeholders (Wikström, 2010). In addition, it highlights three different levels of analysis: individual, organizational and societal. It is argued that when all three pillars are considered together, it will be possible to discuss sustainable HRD (Docherty *et al.*, 2002).

Research has identified factors, including individuals and organizations, that can lead to a sustainable paradigm of HRD. Chief amongst these factors is the role of leadership. It is argued that a leader’s approach to HRD practices is essential in developing sustainability beliefs within an organization (Srivastava *et al.*, 2019, 2020; Wikström, 2010). Therefore, where HRD practices are designed and implemented that focus on developing employees’ positive attitudes and beliefs about sustainability, this is an essential component of developing a motivational climate that supports sustainability in all its forms. When leaders emphasize these types of practices, they create a sense of community around sustainability issues but also motivate employees to work more effectively to achieve sustainability goals (Jang and Ardichvili, 2020). Strong leadership behaviours also contribute to the development of positive attitudes, the enhancement of existing skills and the development of developing



new competencies and mindsets (Rimanoczy and Pearson, 2010; Gond *et al.*, 2011; Garavan and McGuire, 2010).

Organizational learning strategies are also a substantial level that can be used in the context of helping HRD to contribute to sustainability. These strategies can include the fostering of reflection, creativity and continuous learning collectively within the organization. HRD practices can play a significant role in promoting a learning culture throughout the organization (Liebowitz, 2010). For example, scholars have highlighted the value of action learning and field projects to promote sustainability goals and priorities (Haugh and Talwar, 2010). These and other organizational learning strategies play a key role in helping employees to resolve sustainability-related issues, in addition to motivating them to perform and contribute more in terms of sustainability.

HRD programs in India gained attention in the early 80s. Employees in every organization were not only considered an essential input to the desired output but were also considered an important asset of the company. With the change in perspective, a sustainable approach toward HRD attracted the attention of practitioners and scholars. However, it was till the late 20th century that more emphasis was given to the integrated approach to the development of human resource management. Organizations emphasize improving the capabilities of their employees and developing of supportive, positive and growth-oriented organizational culture. All these steps were made to ensure competence, commitment and culture building (Jang and Ardichvili, 2020; Jithendran and Baum, 2000; Srivastava, 2017).

Sustainable HRD in India has emerged as a critical issue. With an increasingly dynamic and diverse workforce, a developing nation like India has been facing difficulties. The concerns are specifically in two aspects- first, in managing to attain skilled employees and second, in retaining the talents. Jobs in the Indian market increased with start-ups and small businesses. Different government policies and schemes augmented the overall number of people in the workforce. These schemes aimed to encourage skill development among the workers and prepare the country to meet future technological needs (Srivastava and Dhar, 2016). Even the loan schemes to help small entrepreneurs helped in generating new employment opportunities in the market. Despite multiple initiatives, a significant issue was the gap between the required and available skills. Educational institutions and skill training institutions were established to improve the skills and knowledge of prospective candidates, but the system prepared skilled yet non-employable candidates (Gupta, 2020) (Ed.). Thus, the gap between supply and demand increased the percentage of unemployment to more than 7% in 2019–2020.

Further, managing employees from diverse backgrounds became an issue in ensuring the sustainability of HRD practices. More highly qualified women workers (approximately 25%) have joined the workforce in the last decade. Around 6.7% are among older age (Dey *et al.*, 2012) employees in industries, while around a quarter of the whole population are young joiners. People from different customs, beliefs and religions are also adding to diversity in the workforce. Since India has this unique ability to carry different religions and diverse thoughts simultaneously, these reasons are causing significant issues in sustainably managing HRD. Frequent changes in policies to remove bias, gradual changes in attitude towards particular gender or religion and sudden shift in market needs are adding to challenges in sustainable HRD in the country. Regarding the retention of talents in organisation, management of human behaviour was among the problematic area. To ensure sustainability, HRD programmes ensure a better fit of employees with their jobs, encourage their involvement in their work and improve their capability to attain common goals. However, in India, because the significant gap occurred due to challenges with leadership style, stress management and mental health cautions, ensuring sustainable HRD has become a significant challenge in the country. Gender pay bias and need-based training must also be

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emphasized to ensure sustainable HRD (Joshi *et al.*, 2019; Srivastava and Rastogi, 2019). Hence, it requires research and experiments to understand what policies and frameworks can be adopted to manage and establish sustainable HRD practices.

### The focus of the special issue

This special issue is an acritical key focus on developing insights on HRD and sustainability in India. Therefore, we publish four papers that address different levels of sustainability and HRD. The first paper, titled “Inclusive leadership: new age leadership to foster organizational inclusion” by Kuknor and Bhattacharya (2020), highlights the relevance of embracing diversity and inclusion as a key function to achieving better organizational results. The paper evaluates the role of inclusive leadership to meet the changing needs of a diverse workforce to make organizations sustainable. As sustainable HRD leads to sustainable and inclusive organizational culture, the paper conceptually suggests establishing an advanced workforce with diverse competencies to enhance organisation effectiveness. The paper emphasizes the role of inclusive leadership in developing a learning culture that can make the organization a better place to work. The paper concludes that by paying attention to inclusive leadership, an organization can make strides in terms of achieving sustainability in the workforce.

The second paper, titled “Employer branding at armed forces: current and potential employees’ perspective” by Kaur and Shah (2020) the study highlights the relevance of employer branding, a process of developing and promoting an identifiable and unique employer identity towards ensuring sustainable HRD in military organizations. Through an empirical analysis, the study posited the role of positive employer branding and its role in encouraging new talents to join the armed forces and motivating them to stay in the forces in the long run. Additionally, through the development of solid employer branding and by reinforcing the social identity among personnel, military organizations can attain a competitive edge over their competitors i.e. public and private sectors. The study is descriptive in nature and used mixed methods consisting of qualitative interview-based data and questionnaire-based data. The study findings are analysed within an instrumental and symbolic framework. The paper also explores the factors that influence individual perceptions, including discrimination, risk, stress, confidence and personality, job security and task diversity. The study concludes that, although military organizations are voluntary organisations, they need to establish positive perceptions among prospective candidates and existing members and position themselves as desirable employers through tangible and intangible benefits. In line, by communicating its exceptionalality to the new and prospective candidates, existing employees and society, as a respectable place to work for the armed forces, can use employer branding to enhance the internal and external employer attractiveness (Balmer and Greyser, 2002; Bergeron, 2001).

The third paper, titled “A scale to measure organizational stress among women workers in the garment industry”, authored by Sharma and Srivastava (2020), emphasized issues and challenges faced by women employees working in the garment industry and its role in ensuring sustainable HRD practices. The study analysed the factors that lead to causing stress, burnout and intention to leave among female employees. In line with this, the study showed the job-related factor, organization-related factor, social factor and personal factor as significant stressors among female employees. It emphasized increasing women’s participation in the manufacturing industry by providing them with a conducive environment. As the workforce in the manufacturing industry is changing and the pace of changes in HRD policies and practices are not in tune with the changes in workforce composition, the study filled the crucial gap in its given context. Additionally, the study used a descriptive approach. It developed a scale to

measure the context-specific variable, i.e. stress and its effect on the development of policies and frameworks to reduce the effect of stressors. Hence, the study provided a significant role in understanding the pace of changes in workforce composition and highlights the need to emphasize on development of sustainable policies for HRD.

The fourth article authored by [Aparna and Menon \(2020\)](#), “Impostor syndrome – an integrative framework of its antecedents, consequences and moderating factors on sustainable leader behaviors,” addresses the individual perspective on HRD practices. Through an integrative literature review, the paper develops a cohesive model exploring antecedents of impostor syndrome. Further, it proposes the intervening effect of mindfulness and leader-member exchange. The study highlights the role of impostor syndrome, a career-related phenomenon where individual is not able to own their success despite evidence of their capability and effort. Such individuals fear to incompetent and consider themselves as faking success rather than accepting their success. Specifically categorized higher level executives and leaders, impostor syndrome affects personal, professional and organizational lives. Since this syndrome is highly overlooked by the HRD realm of learning and career development, the study filled in the gap. It analysed its relation with other factors theoretically. Additionally, the study evaluated the defending effect of leader-member congruence/incongruence on leadership behaviours and work-related outcomes. It introduced the concept of mindfulness as an antidote to impostor syndrome. Hence, the study presents the conceptual model of predictors and outcomes of impostor syndrome, its effect of sustainable leader behaviour and the development of sustainable HRD practices.

The final article in this special issue by Alain [Guette and Vandembemt \(2020\)](#), titled “Reframing organizational change from a processual perspective”, emphasizes on organizational change and the processual approach in HRD practices. The study explored the process, including enactment and re-enactment of organizational change steps. It argued that “organizational change “becomes” through a dynamic equilibrium of different conceptualizations of change and related qualities of sensemaking” (p. 4). Using Heidegger’s three modes of being-in-the-world theory i.e. availableness, occurrentness, and involved thematic deliberation, the study identified three dominant conceptualizations of organizational change – wayfinding logic, managerialistic logic and reflexive logic. Further, the study theorized corresponding phenomenal qualities of sensemaking, namely absorbed sensemaking, detached sensemaking and mindful sensemaking. Thus, the study highlights the arena of learning and development with a fresh understanding of how to extend the sensemaking repertoires of managers and employees in realizing organizational change. The study contributed by transcending the polarization of tensions amid planned and emergent styles to change and enabling alignment with the living reality of practitioners and managers. The study’s findings added value to the refinement of the literature of organizational change by explicating varied understandings of organizational change from the phenomenological viewpoint and its linkage with the sensemaking processes of change recipients.

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#### Further reading

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