

## Employee Engagement in Sustainability Initiatives Positively Impacts Their Implementation

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### Abstract

Every day it is becoming more evident that the climate is changing across the world, temperatures of continents are changing, hot places are becoming more hotter and cold places are becoming more cooler, clearly endorsing the greenhouse effect and the pace in which it is happening. It is imperial for the world to recognise that much more efforts are required to implement the sustainability practices in order that the global Sustainable Development Goals SDGs are to be achieved. Countries are collaborating and the sustainability is catching up the tempo and is being recognised as an important topic, but still lot of work is required for the companies to enhance sustainability approach in developing their products and services. The success of company's sustainability initiatives and practices depends a lot on the employees' acceptance and awareness especially for the service industries. Even in manufacturing and construction industries, the complete success in implementing their sustainable strategies will be achieved with the acceptance and awareness of these initiatives by the employees working with them. This research aims to investigate how employee engagement can affect the successful implementation of an organisation's sustainability efforts, additionally it focuses on examining the effects of the employee engagement in overall motivation of the employees. The employee engagement makes the employees aware about the fact that their behaviour and actions on implementing their company's sustainability practices can support the communities, and global businesses and the world. A mixed-methods approach is used for this research, which includes both qualitative interviews with the employees, managers and the other stakeholders like suppliers and vendors, and quantitative surveys with employees and suppliers respectively. According to the findings employee engagement plays an important role in implementing sustainability initiatives effectively. It is proven that employees who are engaged and have strong feeling of belongingness to an organisation are likely to contribute and participate in implementing the culture of sustainability in their behaviour and work processes. The result of the study concludes that the companies that engages the employees in sustainability initiatives tend to be more successful in achieving their sustainability goals and may have the competitive advantage over the other companies in the same business, and the results are more substantial and measurable. The employee engagement in sustainability also promotes and enhance productivity and company reputation and supports the companies in compliance with the environmental regulations. Engaging employees in sustainability initiative aligns their motivation with their company's vision and service deliveries. The research can be used for companies HR departments to implement strategies to create awareness and engagement of the employees in the sustainability initiatives.

**Keywords: sustainability, employee engagement, sustainability initiatives**

### 1. Introduction:

The organisations that seek long term growth and social responsibility, Sustainability has become a strategic essential. These strategies and priorities of the organisations however crucial they are, but their success largely depends on their people that implements and execute these strategies and policies. Employee engagement is described as the commitment, involvement and enthusiasm that they demonstrate towards their organisation and its goals. The employees play a vital role in ensuring the initiatives taken up by the management are not only implemented properly and effectively but also practiced into day-to-day work practices.

It is said that companies or organisations are the main cause of environmental problems (Renwick, 2016) and these in turn are very often the cause of social problems, these are also highlighted by (Casey D. , 2016) in his study on Employee, Sustainability and Motivation. This study analyses the correlation between the employee engagement and the effective and successful implantation of sustainable goals and initiatives of any organisation. The paper prioritises and highlights that motivated workforce can positively impact the implementation of the sustainable initiatives the organisation plans to achieve. The paper further extends its exploration to the role HR plays in inculcating sustainability into the culture of the organisation.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Employee Engagement and the concept of engaging employees.**

As described in the study of William Kahn, the employee engagement refers to the emotional and intellectual commitment employee develop towards their organisation (A, 1990). Employee who are engaged demonstrate higher levels of productivity; they usually have better job satisfaction and organisation citizenship when it comes to having a sense of ownership. When the concept is applied to the sustainability initiatives, the engagement of the employees translates into proactive and cultural shift of behaviour's that support the environment and social initiatives. The world population is growing tremendously, and the availability of potable water is increasingly becoming a challenge in many countries. Our atmosphere will need a serious shift in people perceptions and behaviours to slow down the depleting resources. (Davis & Stephenson, 2017) On the whole, global consumption of resources is steadily increasing and employee must be made aware about the information as much as possible and if the organisations must implement their sustainability initiatives and goals then the employees buy-in of the idea and their engagement is key to its effective implementation. Many studies indicate that the natural resources are depleting, and it will become unbearable for the environment soon, and therefore, it is critical that organisation develop sustainable goals and strategies to produce and deliver services that are environment friendly. The approach is to actively involve employees in sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR) issues and in this way lead employees to the perception of their jobs as being meaningful. Consequentially, increased engagement is expected, which in turn is positively related to business performance profitability.

### **2.2 Organisations Sustainability and Goals and Initiatives**

Sustainability goals and initiatives of the organisations include management programs CSR activities, fair labour practices and long-term business operations. Studies as conducted by (Elkington, 1997) , suggests that those companies which integrate sustainability strategies tend to perform better both financially and socially.

### **2.3 Correlation between Employee Engagement and Sustainability Success**

Studies have shown that companies with higher employee motivation and engagement report better sustainability outcomes, (al, 2015) Employees who are engaged and aware about sustainability are more likely to implement eco-friendly practices, support CSR programs and sustainability initiatives of the organisations.

Features and Processes that supports engagement to sustainability in an organisation:

**Empowerment and Recognition** Employees engagement levels increase if they are empowered and recognised for their contributions.

**Intrinsic Motivation:** Those employees who are aware and believe in sustainability' purpose are more likely to implement green habits and initiatives.

**Organisation Citizenship Behaviour:** Employee who engaged and involving go beyond the call of their duties to contribute to sustainability initiatives.

## **3. Role of HRM in Driving Sustainable Engagement**

HR plays a vital role in prospering employee engagement in their sustainability initiatives. There are various strategies that are included that can directly influence the engagement of the

workforce.

3.1 Recruitment and Onboarding for Sustainability: Right from the interview and selection stages if there are focus on the sustainability, it can help inculcate the culture of sustainability awareness amongst the workforces. Onboarding is a key to ensure the sustainability culture is propagated throughout the organisation.

### 3.2 Leadership Commitment in Culture Building

Any management system to be effective must have a top-down approach, Leadership commitment to sustainability goals and initiatives have a direct influence on the employee engagement. Management that leads from the front in terms of behaviour motivates the employees to follow their footsteps. Firms that inculcate the culture of environment sensitiveness and sustainability tend to create an effective mechanism to get high employee engagement.

### 3.3 Learning and Development

The L&D initiatives in the organisations can focus the awareness as well as role specific trainings for the employees for them to understand and develop knowledge regarding their role in the bigger cause of providing their contribution for the environment and how their work impacts the environment and the society.

### 3.4 Performance Management

Sustainability related KPI's can have meaningful and measurable results in terms of quantifying the engagement of the employees in terms of the sustainability initiatives and its effective implementation.

### 3.5 Rewards and Recognition

The rewards and recognition can be developed by the HRM to appreciate employee's contribution towards the effectively implementation of the sustainability initiatives.

## 4. Research Methodology

This study has incorporated and combined method approach of both quantitative and qualitative research methods to explore the relation between employee engagement and successful implementation of sustainability goals of an organisation.

### 4.1 Research Design

This study has followed both exploratory research design to examine the theoretical framework and empirical evidence to understand how employee engagement relates to sustainability initiatives.

### 4.2 Data Collection

#### 4.2.1 Quantitative Approach (Survey Based Research)

The study utilised a structured survey with the case study in Gulf Catering and Support Services L.L.C that was administered to employees and managers across various department to assess their level of engagement in sustainability initiatives and the perceived impact on implementation. The survey included demographic information like, age, gender, job category, department etc. Sustainability involvement for questions assessing participation in green initiatives and workplace relationships and behaviour. A Likert-scale responses on the success of the sustainability initiatives of the company.

#### 4.2.2 Qualitative Approach (Interviews)

Semi-structure interviews were also conducted with HR Department and HSE Department who are responsible for the training in the organisation and interested employees who are very engaged and called as Sustainability Champions within Gulf Catering and Support Services. These interviews focus predominately on how the employees perceive their roles in sustainability, Organisation's initiatives to reward and encourage employee participation, best practices in various projects within the company, challenges and areas of improvement.

### 4.3.3 Data Sampling

A sample size was determined by using finite population correlation (FPC) formula. The



required sample size for the population of 1850 employees with a 95% confidence level a 5% margin of error was determined to be 318 employees. A random sample survey of 318 employees across various projects and departments was conducted.

Interview were conducted for 18 employees who are officers and managers from Operations, HSE and HR department of the company.

#### 4.4 Data Analysis

Qualitative Data: Thematic and Graphical analysis was used to identify common themes and best practices from interviews.

Quantitative Data: Regression Analysis and correlation tests are used to determine the employee engagement and sustainability outcome.

#### 4.5 Ethical Considerations

All ethical considerations were exercised like participants anonymity and confidentiality, consent to share data for management reports,

### 5. Results and Discussion

#### 5.1 Qualitative Results

The companies that have strong sustainability cultures report higher participation by the employees. Companies culture make a huge difference in the success of engaging the employees and sustainability imbedded in the organisation culture fosters higher employee engagement. The qualitative interviews were analysed, and key results of the qualitative research echoes the results of many companies that Leadership commitment and support is crucial to overall success in getting the employment engagement for the sustainability initiatives. The lack of rewards and recognition could impact the employee engagement in sustainability as implementing an effective recognition program combined with a reward program for achievement of goals for sustainability can bring better participation therefore increasing the engagement of the employees. The study from the qualitative survey also depicts the challenges the firm is facing; the study demonstrated that Gulf Catering and Support Services faces certain challenges like, there is strong awareness but the lower participation, where the employees are aware due to onboarding process and some regular activities being conducted however incentives to be in place to be more effective.

#### 5.2 Quantitative Results

The survey conducted demonstrates clearer picture of the scenario in the company in terms of employee engagement in Sustainability. The report showed a high awareness of sustainability of the staff. The leadership involvement is highly appreciated within the organisation. Training on sustainability was rated moderately so was the implementation of the sustainability initiatives in the operations. Rewards and recognition related to sustainability participation and efforts were rated the lowest as the area of improvement. The demographics gives the insight of the age group the company has and what age group are more engaged and accordingly the companies can develop the engagement activities as well and plan their sustainability strategies. Figure 1 shows the age group Gulf Catering and Support Services has which directs that majority of the workforce is very young and needs lot of training to engage them for better tomorrow.

### AGE DISTRIBUTION

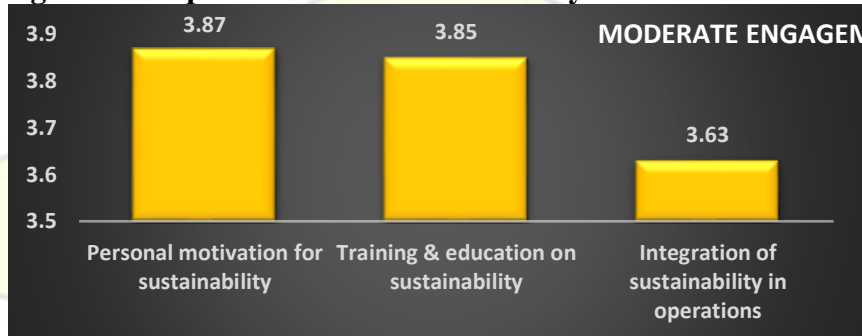


Figure 1 Age Distribution as Gulf Catering and Support Services.

The positive points observed in the report depicts a higher awareness amount the staff in terms of sustainability initiatives of the company.

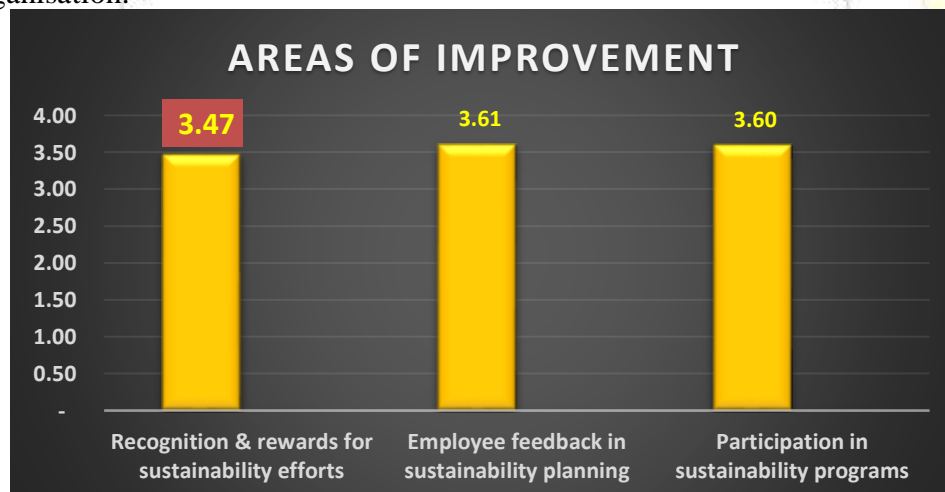


Figure 2 The positives of the Sustainability Awareness Situation



The figure 3 depicts the elements which moderately successful in the company.

The figure 4 shows the Areas of improvement that the company might want to work on in terms of enhancing employee engagement as well as making the sustainability initiatives successful in the organisation.



## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

A successful sustainability initiative of an organisation directly related to the employee engagement, more the employees are engaged, higher the changes of their effective implementations. Hence organisations should choose to prioritise sustainability topics and initiatives in their training programs to increase sustainability awareness amongst the employees. An effective reward program to appreciate the efforts and contribution of the employees can bring in higher employee engagement. Leadership commitment is key to promote employee engagement. The role of HRM as well is vital in enhancing the employee engagement for successful implementation of sustainable initiatives. The focus on sustainability can be prioritised right from the recruitment and onboarding phase of the employment. Learning and Development Programs should include and prioritise sustainability training for the employees. HRM can also implement KPIs for sustainability in the performance

management system of the company to ensure giving prominence as well as providing mechanism to measure and reward the sustainability efforts accordingly.

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