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## **THE RELEVANCE OF HUMAN CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE HEALTH, SAFETY AND ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT**

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### **Abstract**

*The significant role of effective Human Capacity Development (HCD) in enhancing the achievement of sustainability targets has garnered attention overtime. This recognition has led to investments in Human Capital Development (HCD) Programs like education and trainings for employees by companies to achieve sustainable development or sustainability. However, the holistic relevance of HCD towards sustainable health, safety and environmental management remains a grey area which necessitates a befitting research. This research attempts to fill this existing gap in extant literature. It was discovered that there is the tendency for people to be emotionally and actively driven to synergize towards achievement of sustainability objectives set out by institutions that are committed to enhancing their skills, potentials, capabilities and freedom to make informed decisions. Likewise, it was revealed that the implementation of HCD culture and programs is currently more prevalent within workplaces in developed countries. Consequently, developmental agencies like the European Commission, OECD and UN still have quite some work to do in their bid to encourage the implementation of HCD within the global workplace. The management of companies within developing countries are also enjoined to invest in HCD programs to bridge the existing gap with their developed counterparts.*

**Keywords:** *Human Capacity, Development, Health, Safety, Environment, Sustainability.*

## **Introduction**

The importance of maintaining safe, healthy and undamaged immediate workplace environment within national and international context cannot be disputed. This is evident with robust health, safety and environmental protection plans constantly being implemented to promote wellbeing within and outside corporate organizations globally. These plans are generally geared towards the achievement of improved performance, productivity and sustainability by the management of organizations (Barling, Loughlin and Kelloway, 2002; Neal, Griffin and Hart, 2000). However, the pertinence of implementing human capacity development programs that ensure sustainable safety, health and environmental protection must also be accorded the appropriate cognizance it necessitates. This is partly because it has been recognized overtime that the effectiveness of national or organizational systems are heavily dependent on the motivation, skills and potentials of people, based on the design of systems and processes that meet reasonable expectations in stimulating appropriate welfare and sustainable development of individuals (Guyana National Development Strategy, 2012; World Health Organization, 2000). Thus, it is unsurprising to discover that the failure of most organizational systems is often associated with the lack of continuous promotion and implementation of adequate human capacity development initiatives (Ikharehon, 2007; Isola and Alani 2012). Consequently, this work intends to illuminate the undeniable relevance of robust human capacity building plan within the workplace in stimulating sustained health, safety and environmental development, particularly because there appears to be little to no literature which focuses on the holistic importance of human capacity building on people in workplaces and their immediate environment globally.

## **Methodology**

This study was undertaken using the integrative literature review technique. The rationale behind this is to promote a comprehensive coverage of extant evidence to draw an insightful and progressive conclusion through critical evaluation.

## **Human Capacity Development (HCD)**

The incessant increment in technological advancement within the global space in the last decade has illuminated the immense need to consciously and

continuously invest in expanding the capabilities, knowledge and potentials of people by governments, institutions and organizations to maintain their sustainability. This led to all relevant stakeholders being encouraged to invest resources in the education, training, human resource development and knowledge management of people to ensure sustainability within short and long-term basis (Isola and Alani 2012). Consequently, the concept of Human Capacity Development was inevitably born as a major first step to encourage competitiveness, increased productivity and sustainable growth and development within national and organizational level (Ikharehon, 2007). The concept of HCD has been described by numerous proponents but its fundamental target, motive and importance reflects across board. The World Health Organization (WHO) views HCD as “the development of knowledge, skills, commitment, structures, systems and leadership to enable effective health promotion...[with] actions to improve health at three levels: the advancement of knowledge and skills among practitioners; the expansion of support and infrastructure for health promotion in organizations, and the development of cohesiveness and partnerships for health in communities” (Smith, Tang and Nutbeam, 2006). In agreement, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) also suggests that human capacity building and development involves the level of preparedness of organizations and people to formulate and execute strategic decisions effectively, efficiently and sustainably. In addition, the agency expressed that this process incontrovertibly refers to adjusting attitudes, disseminating knowledge, expanding skill base, capabilities of institutions and people, with the expectation that knowledge exchange and expansion will be maximized to promote short and long-term sustainable development (UNDP, 2005). Similarly, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development/Development Assistance also referred to HCD as the process where institutions, people and the entire society creates, changes, strengthen and maintain their capacity to promote effective performance and sustainable existence over time (OECD/DAC, 2006), while the Canadian International Development Agency also defines HCD as the activities, approaches, strategies, and methodologies which help organizations, groups and individuals to improve their performance, generate development benefits and achieve their objectives (CIDA, 2000). This explicitly implies that an effective and robust HCD process must incorporate strategies carefully formulated to enhance the skills of people

in undertaking their duties effectively, problem-solving and achieving organizational goals and objectives, through an expansion of networks in discovering new potentials based on conscious practices which will be crucial in achieving short and long-term sustainability targets. Essentially, HCD must cover how organizations and people can favorably adjust to changing demands of the society, through strategic repositioning to achieve developmental objectives that ensure sustainability into the nearest foreseeable future.

### **Sustainable Development/ Sustainability**

Owing to the increased demand for improved financial and non-financial performance by organizational stakeholders due to unethical and inauspicious actions that led to the failure of many high-profile companies in the past, the management of companies are now compelled to strive for a balance between their pursuit of economic stability, environmental protection and social interactions with their immediate communities (Al-Belushi and Jackson, 2004; Misra, 2000). This expectation often referred to as the Triple-bottom-line (TBL) rule gave rise to “sustainable practices and activities” (Elkington, 1998) being imbibed and executed as a crucial part of the corporate culture of companies globally to meet stakeholder’s needs and guarantee their existence in the future (Assadourian, 2006). There have been several definitions presented overtime on what “sustainable development” as a concept really encompass. Nonetheless, the fundamentals of sustainable development have remained unchanged but broadened based on the existing realities and complexities. The United Nations Brundtland Commission report in 1982 views sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. In addition, it was also asserted that the meticulous integration of social factors with economic growth that produces positive results and stability refers to sustainable development. The concept of sustainable development has since been refined to “Corporate Social Responsibility” and “Sustainability” which according to Shrivastava (1996) covers “the potential for reducing long-term risk associated with resource depletion, fluctuations in energy costs, product liabilities, pollution and waste management”, while emphasis has been placed on environmental protection and sustainable development of individuals, resources, institutions and organizations on a short and long-term basis by scholars (Valmohammadi,

2014; Góncz, Skirke, Kleizen and Barber, 2006). Consequently, it is crucial for organizations and institutions to operate a safe and healthy workplace environment to attain sustainable development or sustainability.

### **Sustainable Health and Safety Management**

There is compelling and widespread recognition that sustainability is crucial to organizational performance by management globally, which has resulted in sustainable development plans being incorporated as a core aspect of organizational objectives and goals. Nonetheless, it is also well established that achieving sustainability by any organization is heavily dependent on a healthy and safe workplace (Fernández-Muñiz, Montes-Peón and Vázquez-Ordás, 2007; Attwood, Khan and Veitch, 2006; Lee, Lee and Kang, 2012). This has resulted in organizations now consciously striving to provide conditions and culture that protect the health and safety of employees within the workplace to ensure competitiveness, productivity and sustainability on a long-term basis (Duijm, Fiévez, Gerbec, Hauptmanns, and Konstandinidou, 2008; Nordlöf, Wiitavaara, Högberg and Westerling, 2017), while risk and hazard management plans are also being put in place within workplaces to protect the health and safety of employees. Likewise, the Occupation Safety and Health Administration suggests that with the increasing globalization of businesses in modern times, risks and hazards presented also widen within supply chains which requires further management of risks and uncertainty associated with the health and safety of employees within the workplaces across the globe (OSHA, 2016), while Garrett and Teizer (2009) similarly expressed that despite technological advancements evidently promoting productivity within developed economies, it has also however created a more challenging, unsafe and unhealthy work environment. Thus, a robust plan for sustainable development or sustainability in recent times must include a risk management plan that can be readjusted when the need arises to broadly protect the health and safety of employees' overtime. This risk management process may include activities that promote continuous conducive work environment through the elimination of unsafe amenities to reduce exposure to hazards and potential accidents (Lingard, Cooke and Blismas, 2011; Neal and Griffin, 2006).

### **Sustainable Environmental Management**

The growth in industrialization and population globally has adversely impacted and led to increased demands on the ecosystem (Goosen, 2012). These incessant demands have culminated in an unsustainable ecosystem which could result in grave implications if urgent actions to curb excesses are not implemented by stakeholders like nations, organizations and communities (Al-Belushi and Jackson, 2004; Misra, 2000). Businesses across the globe have subsequently promoted and incorporated sustainable environment/ecologically-friendly activities into periodic plans due to the increased awareness that their operations might pose imminent threats to their immediate environment (Kaplan and Norton, 2001). These threats often include excessive utilization of natural resources, atmospheric pollution, emission of harmful chemicals, carbon-footprints, indiscriminate disposal of wastes and general degradation of the ecosystem (Goosen, 2012). In recent time, businesses now commonly set out to utilize raw materials that can be recycled to reduce their carbon footprint and pollution, innovate ingenious waste disposal methods and minimize the usage of natural resources to consciously tackle and reduce the impact of their activities on the environment. Likewise, there is the realization amongst top-management of companies that to achieve economic and social stability it is crucial to pursue the attainment of environmental sustainability (Omer, 2009). Consequently, it is arguable that a major determinant of sustainable development within organizations is the extent to which its internal processes and external activities promote environmental protection.

### **HCD and Sustainability**

Notwithstanding the extent of commitment to the promotion of health and safety of employees within the workplace, as well as the recognition of the impact of organizational activities on the immediate environment by their management, if the human elements (people) within and outside organizations are not duly considered businesses might inevitably fail because the extent of skills, motivation and potentials of people are vital for the short and long-term sustainability of any business. Thus, the relevance of human capacity development as an integrating strategy to ensure sustainable development overtime cannot be overemphasized. Particularly, the motivation by organizations' to invest in the capacity, skills and potentials of its employees to

ensure sustainable health, safety and environmental balance is no longer far-fetched, with evidence that a major requirement for building any sustainable business is the commitment to the welfare and overall development of people (Isola and Alani 2012). Thus, it is imperative to promote the sustainability objectives of organizations by their management in a clearly defined manner, and inculcate the corporate culture of enhancing their employee's potentials through developmental programs, to effectively equip them to play pivotal part in moving their organizations to the next level (Assadourian, 2006). Moreover, although the sustainability performance of businesses are generally evaluated based on the balance of economic, environmental and social performances (El-Khafafi, 2008), nevertheless, their performance is also evaluated especially in recent times based on their investment in capacity development and welfare provision for people within and outside their business operations. In addition, with the recognition that emotional stability and confidence significantly influences the thought-process, adaptation, behavior and communication by people, it becomes important that the capacity of people are constantly developed to motivate them to make informed decisions (El-Nasr, Yen and Ioerger, 2000) which will promote sustainable development. Likewise, Maila (2009) and Sen (1999) also considers that the achievement of sustainable development is heavily reliant on the level of freedom given to people to make their own choices about how and why they are expected to pursue certain objectives.

Having recognized the crucial roles played by sound health, safety and environmental management and the broad importance of HCD to the achievement of sustainability objectives set by organizations, this work proceeds to holistically discuss the tangible relevance of human capacity development in achieving sustainable health, safety and environmental management.

### **HCD and Sustainable Health, Safety and Environmental Management**

The role of HCD towards sustainable health, safety and environmental management cannot be underestimated. Perhaps the most compelling argument for the relevance of HCD towards sustainable health, safety and environmental management is based on the premise that people are driven by emotions which actively influences their decision-making (El-Nasr, Yen and Ioerger, 2000).

Considering this core aspect of human nature, this emphasizes that people will tend to be emotionally attached and actively driven to pursue sustainability targets expressed by institutions that are committed to enhancing their potentials through offering of tools and freedom to be at their best. Consequently, the realization by employees that their management invests in HCD programs like trainings and education to favorably position them to pursue sustainable health and safety within the workplace stimulates their morale to synergize towards the achievement of the goal (El-Nasr, Yen and Ioerger, 2000). Moreover, the recognition that management is committed towards actually running a secured workplace also serves as a reassurance to employees that their welfare is considered paramount and the sustainability of their company in the long-term is prioritized (Zacharatos, Barling and Iverson, 2005). Subsequently, the participation by employees and other organizational members in the pursuit of sustainable health and safety targets will help to prevent or reduce the likelihood of health and safety incidence, and promote the monitoring activities undertaken by management (Neal, Griffin and Hart, 2000; Griffin and Neal, 2000). Similarly, based on the perception that managers and other top-players within organizations remain the major benefactors of HCD programs, it is apparent that their knowledge expansion and education will have a crucial impact in achieving sustainable health and safety targets, especially with Barling, Loughlin and Kelloway (2002) affirming that managers who perceived legally healthy and safe workplace environment as an important responsibility of their organizations being less prone to engage in unsafe actions. Furthermore, stemming from the knowledge that humans are the main culprits for environmental degradation and ecosystem, the education of people (employee and other management members) through HCD trainings expands and catalyzes their understanding of the pressing need for behavioral and cultural changes to protect their immediate environment through conscious actions, which would be an instrumental factor in achieving sustainable environmental management (Ferrer and Alvarez, 2003). In addition, the insights provided through HCD trainings present an ethical and moral lens through which all stakeholders can better understand the part they have to play in protecting their environment and achieving overall sustainable environmental plans by their organizations (Galbadon and Aguilera, 2009).



## Conclusion and Recommendation

The recognition of the immense need for businesses to invest in HCD programs has become evident and supported by the institutional stakeholders. However, the extent to which companies across the globe actually to commit to investments in HCD programs remains to be discovered, although it is now commonplace for leading companies to incorporate HCD programs into their organizational culture. This perhaps may be associated with their financial power and overriding ambition to appear as custodians of human rights and freedom. Nevertheless, it is evident that the commitment to HCD programs within workplaces will be an auspicious investment by any business considering the returns they stand to gain, especially relating to the achievement of sustainability targets and enhancing their organizational image and reputation. However, it is very important that the management of organizations remain painstaking rather than coercive in the bid to elicit the participation of employees in achieving sustainable health, safety and environmental management to achieve tangible and progressive results. It is noteworthy to admit that despite development agencies like the European Commission, UN and OECD playing laudable role in motivating organizations to invest in HCD programs for their employees, notwithstanding, they still objectively must commit more resources to this course to make it a global reality because the implementation of HCD programs is currently more prevalent within workplaces in developed countries. Finally, the management of companies within developing countries are also enjoined to invest in HCD programs to bridge the existing gap with their developed counterparts.

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