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Human resource issues and challenges prevailing in Indian textile & garment industry

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Abstract

The textiles and garment sector is a major source of export earnings, government revenue and employment for India. The sector also contributes significantly to the gross domestic product of Indian economy. Indian textile sector is facing many challenges around the globe, especially post-COVID economic recession and rising cost of production. Therefore, mapping of the human resource requirements and their enhancement to facilitate skilled labour is required for the entire gamut of the textile industry. The shortage of skilled manpower is a major constraint affecting the growth of the Indian textile industry which needs a lot of augmentation and technical and financial assistance from both governments and foreign development partners. To overcome the huge skill gap Integrated Skill Development Scheme has been launched to train workers in various segments - textiles, apparel, handlooms, handicrafts, sericulture, jute etc. and sophisticated HRD strategies for better performance. With the objectives of sustainable HRD and promoting R&D to improve productivity across the entire textiles value chain, the Strategic Plan (2011-16) of the Ministry of Textiles focused on skill promotion of all textile workers and creation of new employment opportunities. Integration of sustainability in HRD has become a new central organizing focus for apparel and textiles higher education. Today's textile trainees are prospective human resources for textile and apparel industry. Our textile education institutes require producing most efficient, highly competitive, technologically updated, resourceful, creative, environment friendly, skilful managers. The HR engaged in T&G industry must be acquainted with the impact of all of the production, distribution, consumption and disposal activities on physical, social, ethical and economic environment, including total quality management, eco-textiles, waste control, recycling, product life cycle analysis, CSR, labour laws, social welfare and healthy labour practices etc. The challenges like sweatshops, child labour, low wages, unhealthy work environment, lack of social capital for technology adaption, need of quality and creativity led policies rather than increasing the quantity of workforce, lack of academia and industry linkage and many more must be treated appropriately for better development of human resources in textile and garment industry. The proper strategy of curriculum designs and models can play a key role in the textile and apparel industry and institutions for generating better resourceful, eco-efficient, cost-efficient, customer-friendly, ethical and socially responsible human resources and by this means nurturing the fascinating dream of sustainable lifestyle of the people around the globe.

Keywords: Employability, human resource, skill development, sustainability, technological upgradation

Introduction

India is among fastest growing economies that requires a firm national system of Human Resource Development and institutional capacities for economic success. HRD and foreign investment have complementary effect in strengthening industrial growth. Appropriate HRD strategy, upgraded skill level of the workforce, improved socio-political stability, policy and management capability attract foreign investment. Forming knowledge and skills that match the changing techno-structure is a great challenge for Indian government. The extent of successfully addressing these issues depends on national system of human capital development — the policies, institutions, organizations, processes, and actors involved in developing knowledge and skills in the local labour force. The investment companies and the government need to provide education and training, bring new skills, information and technology to contribute to HRD of India as a developing country.

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HRD in Indian Textiles & Garment Industry

The textiles and garment (T&G) sector is a major source of export earnings, government revenue and employment for India. The sector also contributes significantly to the gross domestic product (GDP) of Indian economy (Adhikari, 2007)^[2]. T&G is a unique industry in the global economy as it can be used as springboard and ladder for their development journey since it does not require huge capital outlay and factories can be set up with workers with relatively low skills. After the expiry of quotas in 2005, developing countries in Asia experienced a significant growth during the first year post-ATC – e.g., exports from Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan and Thailand grew at between 7 and 15 percent (Adhikari)^[3].

The Indian T&G industry is one of the largest in the world-estimated to be worth US \$ 78.0 billion in 2010, comprising exports of US \$ 22.0 billion and domestic market of US \$ 56.0 billion (Ministry of Textiles, 2011)^[24]. It employs 40 million people, many millions of animals, vast amounts of land, and vast amounts of both energy and water used in the production and transportation of these products (2009)^[22]. India has the second-largest installed capacity of spindles in the world after China. With an installed capacity of 43.0 million spindles, India represents 20% of global spindle capacity. India also has one of the highest weaving capacities in the world (61.6% of global weaving capacity), with a presence of 2.2 million power looms, 3.5 million handlooms, and an estimated 92,000 million looms in the organised mill sector (Ministry of Textiles, 2011)^[24].

Across the SAARC region, human resource base still needs a lot of augmentation and technical and financial assistance from both governments and foreign development partners (Ahmed, 2011)^[4]. The importance of HRD in Indian T&G industry cannot be overemphasised. Employers' organisations face the challenge of defining their HRD role since it affects their contribution to the economic and social development of their countries in the 21st century (Tan, 1997)^[25]. The shortage of skilled manpower is a major constraint affecting the growth of the Indian textile industry. The major concern which might hamper the growth prospects of the industry is the non-availability of quality & skilled manpower and the inadequacy of training facilities in the country.

Indian textile sector is facing many challenges around the globe, viz. consumers' attitude inclined towards sustainability, social and ethical values, fair trade practices; worldwide increase in demand for ethical textile products, economic recession and rising cost of production, etc. Therefore, mapping of the human resource requirements and their enhancement, to facilitate skilled labour and to enhance the welfare of all textile workers is required for the entire gamut of the textile industry.

Objectives

In the view of above context the following three objectives were set for the study

- Contemporary, emerging and future HRD Issues in Textile & Garment Industry in India.
- Challenges for HRD Faced by Textile & Garment Industry in India.
- Strategic Measures to Meet the Challenges for HRD Faced by Indian Textile & Garment Industry.

Methodology

The data was collected from various books, journals; press releases, bulletins and websites of the concerning institutions,

research theses and post conference publications. As the study was theoretical, the data was analysed conceptually.

Result and Discussion

HRD Issues in Textile & Garment Industry in India

Due to globalisation, rapid technological change, fast and cheaper communication and transportation, India has embraced market oriented development strategies to enhance its trade to the world economy. Now the enterprises need to update the skills of their employees more frequently to respond to the opportunities or threats created by globalisation and rapid technological change (Chandra, 1998)^[7]. Indeed intense global competition is reconfiguring the market place. The attitudes, knowledge and skills of the workforce of the enterprise and its contractors and suppliers will determine the quality of the human system and processes behind its products and services.

A. Contemporary and Emerging Issues

Round the globe, there is a rising demand for sustainability, fair trade, ethical production and Corporate Social Responsibility. Under the umbrella of human rights, these facets focus on the conditions under which consumer goods are produced in developing and newly industrialized countries. Along with the most important trouble of poor skill level of the human capital, the trade of Indian T&G products is influenced by several others emerging issues, some of which are discussed below:

1. Skill Requirement of the Enterprises: The T&G industry requires a range of skills for its multidimensional arena of tasks, such as the capacity to collect, analyse, organise and apply information; ability to use and apply appropriate techniques in a new context at work, attitudes and knowledge that facilitate processing of information and thereby enabling workers to adapt quickly to new demands at work. Higher learning skill of the workers enables more efficient application of new knowledge to work thus greatly assisting the enterprise to meet its strategic goals and competitive challenges (Tan, 1997)^[25].

Today's workplace involves increasingly interaction with sophisticated computerised equipment to conduct inventories, report on production levels, measure machine parts or specifications etc. Deficiencies in these skills will result in productivity decline, increased accident rates and costly production errors. Communication is central to the smooth operation of an enterprise, since it is at the heart of winning and keeping customers. Adaptability, problem solving, creative thinking, effective teamwork, decision making are must to come up with something new, to visualise, foresee or form new combinations of ideas to fulfil a need that expand markets and improve such elements as productivity.

The Indian T&G industry has a serious deficit of Developmental Skills (NSDC, India)^[16]. Managing Personal and Professional-Growth, a focused work life, organisational productivity, goal setting and employability/career development influences the behaviour, attitudes and desires of workers and ultimately contributes to an enterprises' ability to carry out its mission and strategies.

2. Environmental Issues: From an environmental point of view, the clothes we wear and the textiles they are made from can cause a great deal of damage. Each stage of textile and apparel production and distribution requires massive quantity of clean water, energy and chemicals and human resource as

well for processing. These conventional practices cause environmental disparity, increasing industrial pollution, industrial waste disposal problems, that can be reduced to a great extent if we are actually intended and make efforts to attain the healthy, pollution free ecological environment (Acharya, 2010) ^[1]. In recent years, not only the companies in textile and apparel industry but the consumers also began to realize the importance of environmental responsibility in the global textile-apparel-retail supply chain as well as consumption.

3. Social Concerns: Associated social and environmental concerns are growing towards economic and social health of the farmers and industrial workers. To deal with these problems, awareness and understanding in this regard are requisites to create positive effect about socially responsible business structures (f2f, 2012) ^[23]. There is a call for taking incremental steps in supply chain processes, social welfare and economical benefits of the human capital involved in T&G production and development to craft a blissful, flourishing and just society.

4. Human Rights and Labour Issues: Garments produced in India are sold all around the world. This global trade can lead to improved Indian economy, and creates employment for many people - often women - providing them with financial stability and a chance to escape poverty. But the process is not perfect, with low wages, poor worker's rights (inadequate health and safety, long hours, no contracts) and child labour apparent in the Indian T&G industry.

5. Sustainability: Sustainability and going green are mantras for today's world. Sustainability is gaining importance because of heightened ecological challenges. Sustainability is the concept of meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The UN declared 2005-2014 as the decade of sustainable development encouraging educational institutions at all levels to nurture ecologically literate individuals (Pasricha, 2010) ^[3]. We should prepare individuals to know the target market perceptions and barriers as they relate to sustainability and try to remove barriers to bring positive life-style change.

6. Fair Trade: Adverse impact of fashion has provided a way for innovative thinking to save our earth for generations, i.e., Fair Trade Textiles. It is making clothes that take into account the environment, the health of consumers and the working conditions of people in the fashion industry, throughout its total life span, including its "carbon footprint". These textiles don't involve the use of harmful chemicals and bleaches and are often made from recycled and reused textiles. These clothes are high quality clothes that could last multiple seasons. Because of this people need fewer clothes, less raw materials and energy are used, and there is less waste.

7. Ethical Concerns: Pressures from consumer groups in industrialized countries, including boycotting of products manufactured in sweatshops or in environmentally-unfriendly manner, have brought ethical concerns into the decision-making matrix of the buyers. Most buyers have themselves developed a "code of conduct" with which they want all their suppliers to comply. This includes issues such as working conditions, workers' health and safety, minimum wages, maximum working hours and overtime as well as animal welfare.

8. Corporate Social Responsibility: A growing number of companies participate, make progress, show good financial results and become ever more convinced of the benefits of their social responsibility for all stakeholders, including shareholders (ILO, 1997) ^[18]. It enables companies to implement a pro-active social and environmental strategy, which reduce pollution in the production processes by means of preventive measures and increase workers' productivity and liability. It helps companies to: reduce production costs; attract and retain talented staff; use resources more efficiently; produce safer and better products; reduce levels of pollution and risk; comply with many international standards and codes of conduct; link up with international markets and to improve company image.

9. Changes in Buyers' Behaviour: Textiles and clothing, particularly clothing, is a classic example of a buyer-driven commodity chain. The trend now is toward greater product specialization and brand-name and market segmentation (Adhikari, 2007) ^[2]. The economic power of large retailers, predominantly in developed countries, has increased substantially over the last few years. Many of the most powerful branded retailers such as Gap, Nike and Wal-Mart have captured the largest share of value added in apparel and textiles production by controlling design, input sourcing, branding and distribution.

B. Future Issues

1. Rapid Change of Science and Technology: The exponential growth of knowledge and the rapid change of science and technology is global trend. Knowledge is doubling every 7-10 years. The resultant relatively rapid obsolescence of knowledge and skills have implications for HRD. The education experts accept that the undergraduate degree should provide the essential "intellectual capital" on which to build future learning (Kerry, 2008) ^[19].

2. The Development of Virtual Organisations: The development of virtual organisations has HRD implications. Virtual corporations need workers who are highly educated, reliable, able to understand the new forms of information, adaptable and can work efficiently with others. Employees need not just technical skills but also the skill of learning how to learn to cope with continuous and radical change of virtual businesses. New forms of training which are flexible, on demand and interactive will have to be devised for employees of virtual enterprises. These work pattern changes are increasingly affecting enterprises in India. HRD policies and programmes will have to be changed in response to this change (Future Fashion) ^[12].

Challenges for HRD Faced by Textile & Garment Industry in India

The most frequently found challenges in the textile supply chain are in the field of working conditions and labour standards. The reality in these workplaces is often still quite grim. Wages are too low to live on, 80-hour workweeks are common, and the health and safety of the workers, the majority of whom are women, is constantly being undermined. Workers have no security of employment; women and informal workers, especially those who produce from their homes are discriminated against and harassed. In many countries there is also evidence of bonded or child labour (Beth, 2007) ^[5]. Falling clothing prices have put cheap production in demand all along the supply chain, from pickers

and labourers on farms to factory workers. Much of the manufacture of garments employs unskilled - or low skilled – workers who lack of knowledge of rights, or are prevented from joining together in trade unions (uniform reuse)^[10].

Some of the challenges in front of Indian T&G industry are:

1. Poor Human Capital: The lack of skilled and/or trained human resources, which impedes productivity growth, is a major reason for inability to take full advantage of trade liberalization. Higher levels of technology within foreign companies create demand for more highly skilled workers. Although publicly provided education and training inevitably create the bulk of skills and knowledge in any labour force, the challenge of matching the skill sets in the supply of labour to the demands of industry is always great (Effendi)^[9]. The chief problem has been low absorption capacity due to low education levels and an absence of significant R&D activities, both public and private, within the local economy.

2. Sweatshops: The apparel industry is one industry particularly affected by sweatshops. Sweatshops infringe upon some of the most basic rights of individuals concerning working conditions such as wages, safety, and overtime. Furthermore, sweatshops often employ children (Golodner)^[14]. Most of the times, the government seems to be unable to analyze the labor practices of their textile mills and cannot force them to adhere to international standards.

3. Overtime: Excessive overtime is a common problem in India. Often, people work seven days a week, 14 or 15 hours a day, for months on end. In factories where overtime is so excessive, reducing hours to a regular 48-hour working week with occasional 12 hours overtime means a massive reorganization of planning and production. However this can lead to a substantial increase of productivity and profitability (Michiel, 2006)^[20]. Overtime is caused by tight lead times, late sample approval and last minute alterations to product specification, put increased pressure on factories to deliver orders due to late delivery of raw material inputs (Human Rights)^[17]. There are also few systems for assessing the skills of workers, monitoring worker performance and little opportunity for workers to improve their skills and be promoted to higher paid jobs. The labour shortage is also forcing factories to take on more low skilled workers. This recruitment of new unskilled workers allows the vicious circle to continue.

4. Wages: Indian textile workers are barely permitted to leave the factory site, are paid more than a quarter of their wages only after three years, and there are no trade unions (somo.nl, 2010)^[8]. Excessive overtime is closely linked with low pay as workers are forced to work long hours to earn enough to live on. Low-skill workers and poor productivity and quality management in the factory leads to excessive overtime because fewer pieces can be made in each hour and workers spend time doing rework (Birdman)^[6]. Piece rate workers are not paid for reworking and so high levels of rework significantly affects their pay. This also contributes to high worker turnover (Michiel, 2006)^[20]. Reducing reworking is therefore an important element of boosting productivity as well as reducing working hours without reducing wages (Acharya, 2010)^[11].

5. Bonded labour: Bonded (and also forced) labour can be defined as all work done by any person under the menace of a

penalty for which the person has not offered him/herself voluntarily or for which such work is demanded as a means of repayment of debt. Holding back wages or requiring deposits in order to keep workers in the factory, due to a shortage of workers because of high staff turnover, are forms of bonded labour. The organization, Anti-slavery International, states that textile businesses in India currently operate their locations in conditions approaching slave labor (Evans, 2012)^[11]. Improved human resources management helps to break this contra productive policy by enabling the company to attract and keep workers and to provide them appropriate training and opportunities for promotion, alongside positive incentives to persuade workers to stay.

6. Child labour: Child labour is one of the leading social concerns for the Indian apparel industry. Textile companies are constantly looking for ways to reduce production costs as children do not need to be paid as much as adults, they are more easily manipulated, school is not always an option, and it is a tradition in many nations. Child labour specifically refers to jobs that prevent children from attaining education or jobs that could be detrimental to the child (actrav.itcilo.org)^[26]. According to an estimate, more than 20 per cent of India's economy is dependent on children, the equivalent of 55 million youngsters between the ages of 5 and 14. India is recognized by the United Nations as the world's capital for child labour. Many of those children report working conditions where beatings and physical coercion are common place (Evans, 2012)^[11]. Sometimes children are forced to 'work off' the debt or are sold outright to a company owner as slave labour.

7. Freedom of association and collective bargaining: Trade unions are active in very few garment companies. Better communication ensures that workers understand and support the changes made to management systems, production and incentives to reduce a sense of unfair treatment and dissatisfaction, contributing to continued high worker turnover. This does not guarantee the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining, but the employer will have created the conditions for those to develop (Human Rights)^[17].

8. Discrimination: Discrimination is very common but often difficult to handle. In most cases women have very few opportunities for promotion to better paid positions and also pregnancy will lead in many cases to discharge. In India, young women and migrant workers are often subject of discrimination (wiego.org)^[13]. Whenever this appears, the company is better off to design a more progressive policy on hiring, promotion and human resource management (un.org)^[28].

9. Legal labour contract: In many cases labour contracts are either lacking or inadequate according to law and many workers do not enjoy obligatory social security provisions, often because they prefer to receive the contribution in cash rather than transferring it (tedresearch.net)^[27].

10. Health and Safety: While every factory needs to improve working conditions, those that directly endanger workers health and safety must take priority. Problems found in the textile industry are health risks due to: pesticides and chemicals; fire safety and evacuation routes; ergonomic facilities; temperature, noise and dust; and storage of

chemicals (Michiel, 2006) ^[20]. Where working conditions are poor, workers' health can suffer (with the likes of backache, eyestrain, burns and other injuries. And when long hours - up to 16 hour days in some countries - are factored in, fatigue can compound the likelihood of accidents (uniformreuse) ^[10].

Strategic Measures to Meet the Challenges for HRD Faced by Indian T&G Industry

The prime task of employer organisations is to ensure that the education and training system is "demand driven" and responsive to the changing needs of industry. A combination of public-private partnerships and mobilization of donor support could be an effective way to create better human capital critical for survival in the post-quota world. The T&G industry have more recently adopted sophisticated HRD strategies for better performance. To surmount the huge skill gap Integrated Skill Development Scheme has been launched to train workers in various segments - textiles, apparel, handlooms, handicrafts, sericulture, jute etc. to train approximately 26.75 lakh persons over a span of 5 years. The scheme would be specifically tailor-made to suit the requirement of all the segments of the textile sector, providing for a direct linkage with the job requirements.

Apart from upgrading the existing infrastructure and resources of organisations within the Ministry of Textiles, participation of private sector in the training programmes shall be the major feature of this Scheme. To bridge the skill deficit in the textiles sector, a flagship programme called the Skill Development Programme has been conceptualised to improve the skill base of 30 lakh workers employed in the sector over a period of five years with an outlay of Rs. 2,200 crore (Ministry of Textiles, 2011) ^[24].

Education for sustainable development can be a vital therapeutic tool to address the crucial challenges of sustainable development - production and consumption. With the objectives to have sustainable HRD and growth of and to promote R&D in textiles sector in the country, to improve productivity across the entire textiles value chain, the Strategic Plan (2011-12 to 2015-16) of the Ministry of Textiles has taken skill promotion of all textile workers and handicrafts artisans, creation of new employment opportunities to make these sectors economically sustainable as mission. Higher education institutions are supposed to educate human resource who are closely related to and highly affected by various processes practiced for textile and apparel production. Therefore, integration of sustainability in HRD has become a new central organizing focus for apparel and textiles higher education (Pasricha, 2010) ^[21]. Today's textile trainees are prospective human resources for textile and apparel industry. To compete with other textile manufacturers, not only in India but beyond the boundaries of the country as well, our textile education institutes require producing most efficient, highly competitive, technologically updated, resourceful, creative, environment friendly, skilful managers. The HR engaged in T&G industry must be acquainted with the impact of all of the production, distribution, consumption and disposal activities on physical, social, ethical and economic environment, including total quality management, eco-textiles, natural, herbal and low-impact dyes, waste control, recycling, product life cycle analysis, Corporate Social Responsibility, labour laws, social welfare and healthy labour practices etc. Traditional Indian treasure of knowledge of various special textiles including high quality handloom crafts, peace silk fabrics, ayurvedic medicinal textiles are few of the examples which require revitalization for their survival and preservation

of socio-cultural heritage.

The challenges like sweatshops, child labour, low wages, unhealthy work environment, lack of social capital for technology adaption, need of quality and creativity led policies rather than increasing the quantity of workforce, lack of academia and industry linkage and many more must be treated appropriately for better development of HR in T&G industry. The proper strategy of curriculum designs and models can play a key role in the textile and apparel industry and institutions for generating better resourceful, eco-efficient, cost-efficient, customer-friendly, ethical and socially responsible human resources and by this means nurturing the fascinating dream of sustainable lifestyle of the people around the globe. The garment and textile factories are expected to implement a registration and control system that meets the ILO standards. It is better to provide children part-time, safe and light work together with education than discharging them. For this, companies may collaborate with NGOs that are experienced in helping children (unicef.org) ^[29].

Conclusion

Government policies of investments in demand-driven training programmes, involving industries and foreign academic institutions that have close ties with the advanced developments in technology, business administration and management can help firms achieve considerable productivity improvements to minimize financial constraints and market failures, and to promote foreign companies to invest in HRD of the host economy. The education system requires education of various professions in T&C production since most of the human capital doesn't possess the required level of knowledge and skills. So the companies need to supply additional training-on-the-job at factory level along with R&D in textiles sector, Growth and Development of technical textiles in India, HRD and the Design & Technology Upgradation Schemes to promote skills of all textile workers, handloom weavers and handicrafts artisans, creation of new employment opportunities and development of new designs to make these sectors economically sustainable.

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