

Humanistic Management of the Gig Economy

It's time, policymakers, HR practitioners and academicians come together to think how this growing workforce can be managed more humanely.



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The gig economy has tremendously grown in recent years. According to NITI Aayog, more than 7.7 million employees participated in the gig economy in 2020-21, with the figure expected to rise to 23.5 million by 2029-30 (Barik, 2022).

The digital era and the emerging trend of working from anywhere has opened opportunities for employers, mainly in terms of finding new talent. While grey-collar workers are fast growing in the post-pandemic time, the emerging gig economy finds itself in an era of increasing worker insecurity wherein the promise of a secured income is quickly depleting. Apparently, matters of labor dignity more broadly, and specifically, the security of gig workers, have attracted interest from various quarters.

One of the prominent responses is that of the state, mainly in terms of the recent labor reforms. However, many eyes have found a glaring lack of clarity in interpretation, especially when the intent was to simplify and codify the laws

and, therefore, the legal machinery for supporting ease of business. In the context of gig workers, clarity on definitions of employees and workers and, accordingly, the applicability of wages and social security, as well as rights to associate and handle matters of contestation between employer and employee in the platform economy, remained unaddressed (Chaudhary & Remesh, 2021).

Beyond framing, matters of enforcement are yet another domain that needs clarity of definitions keeping in mind that implementation will have its own set of challenges. Indeed, institutions to regulate the gig economy will remain the partial answer. Gig workers facing challenges of wages and working conditions must therefore be seen equally as issues of interest to the organization. Within the organizational domain, we identify that human resource policies and practices of gig workers are particularly crucial and can make valuable contributions to strategically shape the employment relationship besides impacting the gig economy at large.

Gig workers are barely provided any specialized training, and the industry is also not immune to the problem of skill shortages. Presently, the investment is lopsided towards technology, neglecting the skilling of gig workers who remain as users of that technology.

HR managers can actively think of designing and implementing learning modules to involve gig workers in technological developments. This would require a shift in how gig workers are treated and managed in our organizations. The key for HR managers is to work for that ‘change’ that will not only accommodate gig workers as resources, but also include and integrate them as valuable contributors in the value chain.

Moreover, since gig workers lack comprehensive legal protection, HR managers should step in to ensure that these workers do not become victims of unfair company policies too. Organizations could create specific provisions to ensure that such workers get the available statutory benefits. For instance, relevant internal systems can be erected to proactively ensure that workers have registered on portals such as ashram sites for receiving government benefits. This will also allow getting the statistics correct and help policymakers.

Further, HR managers could use bricolage with startups venturing into medical and accident insurance and work towards possible corporate partnerships that can eventually extend social security protection to gig workers. This move will also bolster corporate responsibility initiatives toward gig workers' wellness and health benefits.

Organizations should acknowledge the diversity of this workforce to unleash the potential and focus more on inclusion. Creating and embracing an environment where gig workers' opinions get valued without biases and where they are encouraged to grow is required. Consideration of aspects like how can hiring be made more inclusive, how can teams be designed to include a mix of both full-time and part-time workers, how can organizational culture be made more engaging and caring – several and many such questions need our interest, time and exploration.

The first step in that direction would be that policymakers, practitioners and academicians come together to think how this growing workforce can be managed more humanely.

References

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Published On Nov 6, 2022 at 06:24 PM IST

Source: <https://hr.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/workplace-4-0/talent-management/humanistic-management-of-the-gig-economy/95338790>