

Employee Well-being and Sustainable Development: Can Occupational Stress Play Spoilsport

Dobre samopoczucie pracowników i zrównoważony rozwój: negatywna rola stresu zawodowego

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Abstract

This study examines the notion of sustainable development in corporate organizations and argues that businesses' adoption of systems/standards to support their sustainable development practices improves employee health and well-being in significant ways. Additionally, the paper analyses the effect of continual or progressive stress that employees face due to their job obligations, circumstances, surroundings, or other workplace pressures and how this affects the organization's sustainability. Given the growing importance of occupational stress due to technological innovations and global economic progress, it has developed into a worldwide sustainability concern, affecting professionals and all types of employees. Additionally, this study proposes a framework for implementing an integrated management systems (IMS) approach centered on the iterative implementation of sustainable development practices to promote employee health and well-being and minimize workplace demands. Further, the significance of studies exploring the relationship between a company's sustainable development policies, its employees' health, and well-being are explored, and future research direction was discussed.

Key words: sustainable development, well-being, occupational stress, job demands

Słowa kluczowe: zrównoważony rozwój, dobrostan, stres zawodowy, wymagania pracy

Introduction

All 193 members of the United Nations signed up to the U.N.'s Agenda 2030, a set of 17 goals for sustainable development, in September 2015. As a follow-up to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, these Global Goals and Agenda 2030 seek to do even more to eradicate all types of poverty. Newly adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are unique in that they call on all countries, rich and poor alike, to take action to increase prosperity while safeguarding the planet. Each of the 17 Goals has its own set of objectives and metrics. Putting people and the world first, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development focuses on three aspects of sustainability, i.e., economic, social, and environmental. This framework provides the basis for addressing the myriad issues facing humankind, including those in the workplace. The new agenda has a philosophical core of *leaving no one behind* (Kharas, McArthur, & Ohno, 2020), with the mindset to attain long-term prosperity for all people by eradicating poverty and other inequalities through the implementation of programs that improve education and health, reduce inequities, and encourage trade and industry growth while protecting the environment. The demographic and labor force statistics available with the World Bank suggest that out of 7.75 billion people worldwide, 3.4 billion individuals compose the labor force in 2020 (World Bank, n.d.a), i.e., nearly half the world's population (44%). The World Bank has also forecasted that roughly 600 million additional employment would be needed by 2030 (World Bank, n.d.a) to accommodate the world's expanding population.

Given that the typical individual spends 90,000 hours on an average working or doing anything linked to work throughout their lifetime (Peppercorn, 2019) and the existence of such a massive number of people as labor force, make it is critical to find out the role of the organization in promoting the health and wellbeing of employees while they earn their livelihood. It is pertinent to examine how promoting employee health and wellbeing helps an organization's sustainable growth in this age of global competitiveness and reshaping the business environment via eliminating trade barriers and transaction costs. Increased international and local competition and liberalization have driven firms to innovate and enhance their processes and products. In an attempt to survive in competitive marketplaces, many organizations adopt processes that result in poor working conditions, poor planning, hasty business decisions, dissatisfied employees, a boom-and-bust situation, and a loss of competitiveness. As a result, organizational processes are not sustainable, resulting in a vicious cycle of degradation and failure. Considering that the majority of firms that fail in the market do so because they place a priority on physical and financial capital but neglect to invest in human capital, which is the most critical aspect in an organization's growth and success (Chivaura & Mararike, 1998; Unger, Rauch, Frese, & Rosenbusch, 2011). In this study, we summarize our current knowledge of businesses' involvement in encouraging employee health and well-being and how this practice helps sustainable growth and vice versa. Additionally, the study will examine the impact of occupation-related stress on the interaction between organizational practices that promote health and wellbeing and resultant ramifications for individuals, companies, and employees' interpersonal relationships. The study concludes by outlining a research agenda for resolving unresolved issues about the organization's role in enhancing employee wellbeing and health via sustainable development techniques.

Sustainable Development

Sustainable development (S.D.) establishes a framework for attaining an environment that meets current demands without compromising future generations' capacity to achieve their own with proper regard for society, economy, and ecology (Hardi & Zdan, 1997; World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). Numerous updates to this conception of sustainable development have taken place since the release of the Brundtland Commission's report (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). In the context of businesses, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD, 2012) defines sustainable development as the concept of enhancing society, the environment, and the economic systems in which an organization operates. Colbert and Kurucz (2007) define sustainability requires a striking balance between economic, social, and environmental performance issues. Boudreau and Ramstad (2005) described it as achieving today's accomplishments without sacrificing tomorrow's requirements. Sustainable development is a guiding concept in philosophy that outlines a specific objective and course of action. Ecology views it as the guiding principle for the design of both artificial and natural structures. While in economics, it is a broad term that refers to the experience of reality. Scholars, however, disagree on defining sustainable development (Eden, 1994; Giddings, Hopwood, & O'Brien, 2002) as it may be limited and interpreted differently depending on the topic of study. Nonetheless, it refers holistically to the long-term sustainability of resources and ecosystems while preserving human living standards; for example, Corporate sustainability refers to the rapid, genuine, and complete growth of a firm. Business strategies and activities that fulfil the demands of the firm and its stakeholders today while also conserving, maintaining, and increasing future resources are described as sustainable development by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (1994).

To conserve, maintain, and increase future resources, organizations must pay attention to problems critical to their survival, establish an internal capacity to regularly notice challenges affecting their long-term holistic development, knowledge & skillset, strengthen their ability to battle opposing forces, and execute changes autonomously. Thus, it requires enterprises to plan for the long-term holistic growth of the company, rather than only short-term financial gains, and to assist all employees in identifying their full potential to improve their quality of life (Di Fabio, 2017). Elkington (1998) established the Triple Bottom Line idea, which asserts that shifting corporate aims make it challenging to divorce or separate intricately tied corporations from the cultures and surroundings in which they operate. While organizations may seek short-term economic benefits, those who do not consider the social and environmental consequences will become unsustainable.

When environmental and social concerns are integrated into the core strategy, measurable economic, social and ecological results may be achieved, resulting in a better work environment and more value for the business, thus meeting all three sustainable development objectives (Lloret, 2016). Achievement of sustainable development objectives results in enhancement of human and environmental resources, which is inextricably linked to worker well-being & health, causing further improvement in such strategies. Given that there is a scarcity of studies addressing this virtuous circle, as illustrated in Figure 1, future studies requires to explore the interplay between sustainable development practices, well-being, and employees and organizational health.

Figure 1. Relation between Corporate sustainable practices, Employee Wellbeing and Health, source: constructed by the author for the present study



Employee Well-being & Health

When companies are trying to move to sustainable development approaches, they face tremendous uncertainty and new hurdles that need them to be proactive, sustainable, and flexible in the event of uncertain operational and commercial contexts. (Boudreau & Ramstad, 2005; Cleveland, Byrne, & Cavanagh, 2015; Macke & Genari, 2019). According to Pfeffer (2010), organizational and work practices may have an even more detrimental and widespread impact on humans and the social environment than their effects on the physical world. Scientific debates around employee wellbeing began relatively recently when the World Health Organization (WHO) defined health as *a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity* (World Health Organization, 2014). Employee health is a proxy for human sustainability and wellbeing since there is evidence that organizational actions about employee management and compensation dramatically influence employee health and wellbeing (Pfeffer, 2010). According to Redington (2005), workers are a critical group of stakeholders for a business. Employees are said to contribute to all aspects of a business, making them a critical asset in assisting the business's growth (Steenkamp & Kashyap, 2010); consequently, human resources are viewed as one of the most critical assets defining an organization's success (Prasetyo & Kistanti, 2020; Tamasevicius, Diskiene, & Stankeviciene, 2020). Focusing on employee wellbeing is crucial for workplace resilience development since it directly impacts employee work behavior, attendance, and on-the-job performance. It also establishes a competitive advantage for a firm (Boles, Pelletier, & Lynch, 2004). Health, wellbeing, human capital, and organizational performance are all dependent and have a significant impact on each other; for example, NextJump, an e-commerce company, has made employee wellbeing a core value. The company believes that if you look after your employees, they will look after your company (Kegan & Lahey, 2016). These methods aided them in reaching a five-year compound annual growth rate of 30 percent in e-commerce sales, which increased by an average of 120 percent during the last three financial years as reported in 2015 (Institute for Health and Productivity Studies, 2015). It indicates that businesses that are actively contributing to their employees' health and wellbeing are getting significant performance benefits. Sometimes individuals experience severe stress because job expectations and pressures do not align with their knowledge and resources. This stress outweighs any potential advantages provided by an organization's support of wellbeing and sometimes presents a danger to employee health. Stress levels vary by profession and demographic group, and an adverse work environment accelerates the ruin and obliteration of an organization.

Occupational Stress: The Spoilsport

Occupational stress is a state when a worker's skills or resources are insufficient to meet the demands of the job, resulting in detrimental physical and emotional reactions or consequences. Occupational stress occurs in all jobs; it is a widespread occurrence connected with an emotional or bodily sense of strain. Employee stress is influenced by job-related, individual, organizational, and environmental variables and has long been regarded as a poisonous component of the work environment, often connected with poor psychological and physical health. The job itself has obligations, ambiguous responsibilities, fluctuating & higher workload, and conflicts, all of which may contribute to employee stress (Gignac & Appelbaum, 1997; Robinson, Clements, & Land, 2003; Tummers, Landeweerd, & van Merode, 2002). Sustainability as a constant process of improvement may initially cause high levels of stress among workers. This tension may reduce over time with ongoing incremental improvements if the change process benefits employees' health and well-being. However, if the transformation process results in excessive workplace stress and uncontrollable negative consequences, it may create a vicious cycle of degradation and obliteration. Workplace stress may have a severe impact on one's physical health as well as one's mental well-being, resulting in a vicious cycle that harms both the individual and the organization and poses severe hazards to workers' health and wellbeing. Additionally, occupational stress may result in exhaustion on all levels: physical, emotional, and mental (Shokrpour, Spickard, Jr, 2002), resulting in absenteeism (Eriksen, 2003; Heo, Leem, Park,

Jung, & Kim, 2015; Van Der Feltz-Cornelis, Varley, Allgar, & de Beurs, 2020), the intention of leaving the workplace (Lo, Chien, Hwang, Huang, & Chiou, 2018; Mosadeghrad, 2013; Said & El-Shafei, 2021; Villanueva & Djurkovic, 2009), loss of caring, significant errors and higher practicing mistakes (Davey et al., 2014; Roll, Siu, Li, & De Witte, 2019), personal dysfunctions (Parker & DeCotiis, 1983), which impact individual performance (Darmody & Smyth, 2016; Motowidlo, Packard, & Manning, 1986; Pithers & Fogarty, 1995), as well as organizational performance (Hamidi & Eivazi, 2010; Keshavarz & Mohammadi, 2011). Additionally, it also affects individual level factors such as work-life quality (Alireza, Rezaeean, Bolhari, & Zare, 2012; Yang, Ge, Hu, Chi, & Wang, 2009), morale (Schaefer & Moos, 1996), motivation (Li et al., 2014), job satisfaction (Hoboubi, Choobineh, Kamari Ghanavati, Keshavarzi, & Akbar Hosseini, 2017; Richardsen & Burke, 1991), mental and social illness such as chronic fatigue (Huang et al., 2019; Williamson & Friswell, 2013), disordered eating (King, Vidourek, & Schwiebert, 2009; Stammers et al., 2020), headaches (Santos et al., 2014; Van der Doef & Schelvis, 2019), elevated blood pressure (Gasperin, Netuveli, Dias-da-Costa, & Pattussi, 2009; Gilbert-Ouimet, Trudel, Brisson, Milot, & Vézina, 2014; Vrijkotte, van Doornen, & de Geus, 2000), enhanced risk of heart disease (Kivimäki & Kawachi, 2015; Kivimäki et al., 2018), musculo - skeletal pains (Buscemi, Chang, Liston, McAuley, & Schabrun, 2017; Carayon, Smith, & Haims, 1999), sleeping problems (Kim et al., 2011; Knudsen, Ducharme, & Roman, 2007), anxiety (Desouky & Allam, 2017; Rada & Johnson-Leong, 2004), suicidal thoughts (Fridner et al., 2009; Loerbroks et al., 2016), and disruption of family life (Repetti & Wang, 2017; Zarra-Nezhad, Mozami-Goodarzi, Hasannejad, & Roushani, 2010).

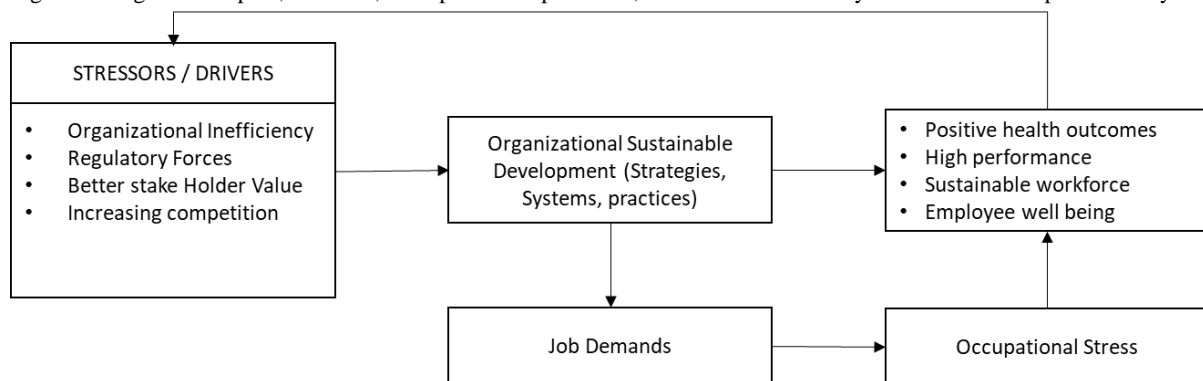
Stress at work is a severe health hazard in the contemporary workplace. It accounts for a considerable portion of the total physical disease, drug misuse, and family issues that millions of blue- and white-collar employees face. Occupational stress may result in physical stress, impairing employees' attention, focus, and the ability to make decisions and use judgments (Shapiro, Astin, Bishop, & Cordova, 2005). Occupational stress is an ongoing condition induced by job situations that adversely affect employees' career advancement and overall wellbeing. These effects place a burden on scholars of organizational behavior and organizational psychology to assess changes in work and employment patterns (Cascio & Montealegre, 2016) and to rethink organizational structure to make it more organic and evolving in capitalizing on technological advancements while also providing a stress-free environment for employees to grow and develop.

Impact of occupational stress on organization sustainable development practices and employee

The availability of resources and technological advancements and the desire to strive toward more sustainable societies have made health and well-being a top priority in the sustainability debate (Lozano, 2012). Sustainability is a triple-bottom-line strategy that combines social and environmental obligations with financial objectives to provide value for both the business and society (Rankin et al., 2011). Business leaders and managers must realize how economic, social, and ecological benefits are intertwined and how they affect the long-term viability of a sustainability transition. It is necessary to identify and examine the systems and processes that promote sustainable performance and build a vision for sustainability to achieve long-term organizational transformation for sustainability. Managers often miss the variables that lead to resistance to sustainable change and the ones that assist the organizational transformation toward sustainable performance (Kotter & Schlesinger, 1989). Even though manufacturing's enormous environmental and social impact has brought sustainability to the fore, most manufacturing companies continue to prioritize economic sustainability more than social & ecological sustainability (Trianni, Cagno, & Neri, 2017). Zhu (2016), on the other hand, revealed that government regulations, rapid technological progress, and economic benefits had encouraged numerous sectors to investigate changes that promote long-term viability and sustainability. Managing change for sustainability in an organization involves a thorough awareness of the barriers and facilitators (Liu & Bai, 2014). Determine which company activities substantially influence sustainability challenges such as labor practices, workforce diversity, and energy consumption. These beliefs, commitments, and ambitions may be included in a sustainable strategy tailored to the organization's specific needs. Clearly defined goals and objectives will certainly enhance business sustainability performance by focusing on issues that are of importance and need to be addressed. As a result, policies and initiatives for enhancing sustainable performance may be successfully implemented. These might range from simple tweaks to established practices to whole new methods of conducting business. They may take the form of new technological investments, product or process redesigns, or R&D expenses. Additionally, they may include initiatives that encourage ethical sourcing, workforce diversity, and more strict rules of behaviour. Whether proactive or reactive, all of these programmes seek to improve workers' wellbeing and health, resulting in increased performance in the company's operations. Additionally, Companies may also conduct community surveys to gauge public impression of their sustainability initiatives, as well as develop community advisory committees to improve stakeholder relations. Making such transformations is a substantial task and requires considerable effort to implement throughout a large and complicated organization. Numerous businesses have implemented management systems to improve their processes, but most are fragmented and focused on a restricted scope or a single organization area. These existing management systems, processes, and structures must be enhanced further to provide a complete foundation for

sustainability (Sealy, Wehrmeyer, France, & Leach, 2010), emphasizing quality and economics and balance against the other two components of sustainable development, namely social and environmental. International Standards Organization (ISO) has developed several standards that can be implemented as a stand-alone system to standardize specific processes or as a mutually exclusive set of multiple standards (ISO, n.d.). This integrated use of management systems/standards, called Integrated Management Systems (IMS), assists management in developing the framework necessary for corporate sustainability. Integrated Management Systems (IMS) support businesses as they select, plan, and execute their strategy for identifying, measuring, and managing their duties and risks methodically and appropriately, contributing to sustainable development. Numerous businesses have relied on Integrated Management Systems (IMS) to aid them in picking, planning, and executing their strategic choices. However, without a proper organizational structure and management processes, firms may be unable to gain the full advantages of sustainable performance. As seen in figure 2, businesses need to align plan, structure, and operational processes to better align activities and encourage employees to embrace a long-term strategy that is financially viable and environmentally friendly.

Figure 2. Alignment of plan, structure, and operational processes, source: Constructed by the author for the present study



Employees enthusiastic, motivated, and engaged are crucial sources of competitive advantage (Macey, Schneider, Barbera, & Young, 2011). When workforces are engaged, they are optimistic and enthusiastic about their work and eager to help the organization achieve its goals and objectives (Macey et al., 2011). However, employees' energy and wellness are depleted due to change-related job demands, including mental, physical, psychological, and interpersonal adaptations caused by a change in the work setting. Apart from the demands associated with pressures at work, such as uncertainty in one's position, conflict in one's role, everyday hassles, psychological demands (Albrecht, Bakker, Gruman, Macey, & Saks, 2015), also aids the occupational stress. As a result of the requirement to learn new skills, habits and inculcate the new organizational culture during times of organizational change process, employees are likely to be exposed to higher work demands and disruption of old colleague connections and networks (Richardsen & Burke, 1991). With the increasing need for sustainability, Change-related job demands will almost certainly grow more prominent, considering it is part of the continuing change process inside the company. Additionally, workload, uncertainty, insecurity at work, conflicting roles, ambiguity in the role, and psychological demands have all been identified as occupational and organizational demands (Bordia, Hunt, Paulsen, Tourish, & DiFonzo, 2004; Goksoy, 2012; Hetty van Emmerik, Bakker, & Euwema, 2009; Rafferty & Griffin, 2006; Simpson, 1998; Smollan, 2015) that can have a detrimental effect on employee attitudes toward organizational transformation process. According to Lee, Sharif, Scandura, & Kim (2017), when workers face such job pressures, *they are more likely to react adversely to the shift and disengage from organizational transformation* may worsen work-related stress and create a vicious cycle by depleting energy and impacting the amount of strain and burnout, eventually resulting in adverse employee outcomes such as tiredness, a sense of occupational stress, and decreased wellbeing. (Fein, Skinner, & Machin, 2017).

Agenda for Research

Sustainability is a complex subject that requires further theoretical and empirical investigation to grasp fully, notably its function in boosting employee health and wellbeing and vice versa. Additionally, stress is seen as a universal phenomenon that affects all working-class people. Hence, the significance of occupational stress in adopting sustainable measures by corporations/organizations must also be investigated. Organizational practices such as excessive work overload, job instability, inadequate training, insufficient remuneration, and limited career options cause stress in the workforce (Menéndez-Espina et al., 2019; *Occupational health: Stress at the workplace*, 2014; Wong, Chan, & Ngan, 2019). The work environment, which may include resource constraints, interpersonal conflicts, and ineffective management approaches, maybe stressful (Bhui, Dinos, Galant-Miecznikowska, de Jongh, & Stansfeld, 2016; Michie, 2003; Mulki, Jaramillo, Goad, & Pesquera, 2015; Snyder et al., 2020). Workers in

Healthcare, Education, and Informational Technology sector have been the focus of most studies that examined how workplace stress affects their health and well-being (De Simone, Cicotto, & Lampis, 2016; Dhar & Dhar, 2010; Guglielmi & Tatrow, 1998; Thong & Yap, 2000; Zhang et al., 2020). Prior research on manufacturing employees has primarily focused on occupational exposure to study associated health risks (Capleton & Levy, 2005; Lai & Huang, 2019; Myers et al., 2003; Yari, Asadi, & Varmazyar, 2016), however little attention has been paid to their psychological health and wellbeing and its relations with organizational sustainable development practices. Sustainability integrates economic, social, and environmental concerns into organizational plans; it is necessary to understand its impact on organizations and stakeholders. Several critical concerns that need to be addressed are:

- a) Who are the various stakeholders with whom organizations may work to accomplish various sustainability goals?
- b) What is the nature of the interaction between the organization and its stakeholders in terms of sustainability??
- c) What kind of partnership between an organization and its stakeholders promotes sustainability most effectively?
- d) Does occupational stress play a detrimental role in corporate sustainability?
- e) How standards/systems be integrated to help organizations in achieving sustainability?

Developing robust theories and successful economic, environmental, and social sustainability practices is critical in organizational behavior research. Future research efforts in sustainability may offer some insight on some of the topics mentioned above. The relationship between sustainability representations and behavioral consequences is intriguing and warrants more research exploration. The role of stakeholders in achieving sustainability necessitates collaborative capacity building to boost business performance (Bal, Bryde, Fearon, & Ochieng, 2013; Fallon, 2013). A more productive and sustainable workforce that is better equipped to work together as a team requires a commitment to a common goal, optimism about success, receptive to knowledge sharing, and capable of coping with occupational stress.

Conclusion

In concluding this research, it is critical to recollect the paper's objective of recognizing the role of workplace and organizational sustainability practices on employees' health and well-being and the detrimental influence of occupational stress on employees due to the organizational change process to promote sustainability in the organization. When considering the function of industries in a nation, whether manufacturing, service or any other, each must play a unique role. Their contribution will be critical to the country's adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Organizations must establish priorities that will guide their actions toward achieving the SDGs, ensuring that their effect benefits, not hinders, their sustainability and contributes to the advancement of society, nation, and the world at large.

Achieving sustainability in organizations requires the engagement of all stakeholders and organizational leadership commitment at all levels to ensure broad participation and consensus building in adopting sustainable development practices by the organizations. However, uncertainty, demands, and volatility in today's world of work put pressure on the workforce and cause occupational stress, which endangers employees' psychological and physical wellbeing and the organizational goal of achieving sustainability. Consequently, employees' outputs are of inferior quality, and they cannot meet their common work objectives and support the organization's sustainability initiatives. Additionally, a greater risk of stressed personnel acquiring different illnesses, poorer organizational identification, higher turnover intentions, worse job satisfaction, and uncordial industrial relations result in higher financial costs to organizations.

Further, overburdened and under-motivated employees are less likely to develop new innovative ideas for creating services/products to help organizations sustain in the marketplace. Thus, an organization cannot accomplish its sustainability goals unless the people who work are content, healthy, engaged, and experiencing just the right amount of stress to spur productivity and innovation.

To maintain a competitive edge in the face of an epidemic like the COVID-19 outbreak, companies must use technology and data in new ways to reconfigure their primary processes, increase the breadth and scale of innovation to improve decision-making, gain speed and agility. However, as a consequence of these changes, employees will experience a significant rise in stress. Though eliminating all work-related stress is impossible, however, implementing meaningful changes to reduce stress requires the implementation of an integrated management system that gradually improves processes and procedures to provide employees with resources to manage their stress in high-demand situations better and involves all stakeholders intending to create a healthy organization as part of a healthy society by including all stakeholders and promoting sustainability. However, an organization's focus on short-term financial gains and a lack of humanistic principles may have severe implications for employee health and psychology, negatively impacting business outcomes and disrupting industrial relations. With each new round of conflicts and fights that the organization is involved in, the situation only worsens and causes a constant threat to the organization's existence. Being constantly engaged in survival strategy rather than development strategy,

organizations fail to recognize & work towards the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals, which will be destructive to the organization, its members, society, nation, and the world at large.

This highlights the critical link between organizational sustainable development practices, Employee wellbeing, and Occupational stress. Given the lack of research exploring this relationship, it is necessary to investigate the association between them.

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