



Modern Industrial Challenges and Future of Work: A Way Forward

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Abstract

The influence of technology on modern industrial relations and the elimination of gender based discrimination upon employment, can be recognized as two key themes of dialogue that has gained the attention of academics at an international sphere. Both such matters hold a significant impact upon determining and crafting the future of industrial relations as it directly affects both the employers as well as the employees in carrying out day to day work operations.

Hence, this paper seeks to address both such subject matters, where at the first part of the article, the author direct the reader's attention upon how technology has impacted the so called 'typical' modes of work arrangements in the modern world and how it has re-shaped the future of industrial relations by facilitating a flexible work structure that revolves around task orientation as opposed to traditional forms of employment. At the latter part of the article, the author directs the emphasis on to a discussion on the importance of achieving gender equality in industrial relations, directed towards the elimination of gender based wage gap in the twenty first century, where it showcases the role of company policy making in aspiring and accommodating such goal, while drawing practical examples from different countries around the world on how legal authorities have mandated regulations with the aim of achieving equality upon the subject matter of employee salary payments. As the primary mode of data and information collection for the purpose of facts analyzation, the author seeks to rely on scholarly articles, related research reports, online resources, as well as other available verified academic sources in order to conduct a fruitful study

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on the subject matter.

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Introduction

According to Mark Stuart, the Co-Director of 'Digital Futures' Research Centre (2019), the impact of new technologies on the future of work has been recognized as one of the most pressing policy concerns that seeks immediate attention from relevant legal authorities in redressing and modifying statutory enactments that governs labor law and employment in the contemporary world. It is clear that, technology undoubtedly has changed the traditional idea of 'employment' where it has challenged the existing systems of industrial norms to deviate from a rigid mode of work systems towards a flexible and innovative modes of employment models that requires adaptation to thrive among industrial competition.

In such backdrop, this paper seeks to elaborate on the impact of technology that has revolutionized industrial relations at a universal scale, while gradually moving onto a discussion on the modern forms of work arrangements that has been introduced to the market where it has transformed the notion of employability to facilitate the modern peaks of the future of work. Later, the author moves into an extensive discussion on the positive effects and challenges that may result from the involvement of technology in business operations while analyzing both the employers as well as from the employees standpoint, by providing practical examples for the benefit of the reader in understanding the impact of technology in modern trade that plays a crucial role in deciding company succession.

Furthermore, on the discussion based upon closing of wage gap, with the aim of eliminating gender discrimination in the modern business world, this paper elaborates upon the role played by the board of management in a company on the making of company policy decisions and further, the government at large by introducing legal mechanisms to facilitate equal payment. Moreover, at the latter part of the paper, the author brings out international examples on how different countries have used law as an

effective tool of direction in ensuing the protection and its implementation of equal payment legislations that are unique to each of such legal systems differing to each country.

Research Methodology

As the primary mode of data and information collection for the purpose of facts analyzation, the author seeks to rely on scholarly articles, related research reports, online resources, as well as other available verified academic sources in order to conduct a fruitful study on the subject matter.

The Impact of Technology on Modern Industrial Relations

Today we live in a world where technology has upgraded the lifestyle of global citizenry, as it has challenged the traditional modes of day to day work-life operations, while introducing sustainable resolutions to enhance work productivity. For an example, the impact of technology on employment and business management is one of such clear indicators that demonstrates the urgent necessity for companies to adhere in to swiftly shifting market trends in a highly competitive global economy.

In such background, the traditional work systems and organizational structures have been exposed to constant transformations in the lines of production, manufacture, operations, and investment capital, associated with modern trends in supply and demand for goods and services, emergence of new forms of marketing tools, changed consumer behavioral patterns, expansion of market enterprises and innovation. Hence, accordingly organizations have adopted modern company policies based upon the adoption of technology and strategic planning that supplements such digital revolution.

Companies worldwide have now leaned towards adopting more flexible work structures that are more compatible with the utilization of technology. For an example, compared to earlier times where all work operations were done manually within four walls of an office under eight hours of rigid traditional work settings, interestingly, organizations in modern times often uses computers, online servers, automated data entry mechanisms, digital

tools, and advanced machinery to improve work productivity and efficiency that in return has created a task oriented workforce and employee friendly company environments.

Furthermore, such adoption of advanced technology in business management has led to the creation of new forms of market productions that has created new business avenues in the global employment market.

For an example, with the implementation of technology interconnected through the usage of mobile phones, the modern food industry has now gone a step further to make use of online food delivery apps to deliver their products to the doorsteps of the consumers. Pickme Foods, Uber Eats are few of such examples for organizations that has created thousands of new job opportunities in the labor market by recruiting delivery men/women on varied forms of employment contracts to assist the organization to reach company goals to maximize profits, while using technological advancements aligned with strategic planning to attract more customers through online marketing and promotions.

Furthermore, such high-tech usage followed by companies have led to the creation of new forms of employment models that has gone beyond the formal types of employment carder, where the organizations in the present day are actively recruiting freelances and part time workers more confidently due to the guaranteed task completion, ensured through automated and digital platforms that enhances cost efficiency and work productivity. Hence, it could be noted that, technology has shifted the typical idea of “working” in to a more flexible yet profitable work structure that has given ‘employment’ a new meaning.

Moreover, ‘work from home’ can be named as one of such popular modes of employment that can be seen in the recent years, where work is carried out by employees through online platforms with the help of storage tools as google drives, the cloud, and other.

It could be noted that, the importance of embracing these modern technological advancements were highlighted especially during the

Covid-19 pandemic, where the whole world was forced into a lockdown while companies were compelled to carry out their day to day work operations alongside of a minimum staff presence, which would have been an impossible task without the usage of technological assistance.

For an example, the conduct of formal business conferences and client meetings through the use of networking apps such as the Skype, Zoom and WhatsApp during the lockdown has have majorly paved the way for companies to continue their professional business operations without any disruption. Hence it is safe to note that, technology has completely reshaped the modern systems of work arrangements through remote access and online service models that interconnects the employer and employee within just a click of a button.

Furthermore, it could be noted that, technology has guided organizations to create a clear and a transparent flow of communication through the use of online platforms, where digital tools as email, texts, group chats and other helps to send direct messages to a larger number of receivers, avoiding any opportunity for miscommunications. Hence, such has improved the efficiency of work arrangements, speedy resolutions, collaboration, and unity of organizational work models that has maximized employer-employee engagement and innovation.

However, notably, another direct consequence of the high demand for technological adherence in the industrial sector, can be named as the corresponding shift in skill demand in the labor force, where the modern job market is aimed at creating a knowledge based workforce that compliments the digital evolution. It could be seen that the basic knowledge on IT and interrelated fields provides a competitive advantage for suitable candidates in most company openings in the modern day, as the usage of technology is undeniable in any organization in present business operations.

It is important to note that, in such a scenario, a sudden policy change in a company that aims to invest in new machinery to replace manual labor for cost reduction, may lead to the displacement of certain job roles that

may leave employees redundant. For example, Frey and Osborne (2013)¹ claims that 47% of U.S. workers are “at risk” of been made redundant as technology may replace such workmen job role in the recent future.

According to the World Economic Forum (Future of Jobs Report 2018), it was found that machines and technological adoption by organizations were expected to displace a larger number of traditional career opportunities, and yet however, it has also created new forms of employment for millions that maybe relevant for the future generations.

For an example, Data coaches, IT Specialists, Cyber Security Specialists, AI Trainers and translators, Database administrators and Data scientists² are few of such new-found job roles that were introduced by technological advancement to the current employment market.

On a positive note, it is to be noted that the adaption of technology has widen the horizons of recruitment for companies where it has granted access to the global and international talent pools. Hence, in such backdrop, modern companies hold the advantage of hiring and obtaining the best skill sets in the market regardless of country based ventures as online platforms brings out the international talent to their company doorstep.

Accordingly, ‘outsourcing’ can be named as a popular concept in the field of business and management in the recent times, as it provides both cost effectiveness as well as efficient task management as technology guides companies to follow multiple employment formats to gain required expertise for each project in hand, while in return providing employees the opportunity to join their dream company regardless of which part of the world it may be situated.

Hence, the use of technology has allowed the employees to have

¹ Carl Benedikt Frey & Michael A Osborne, 2013. "The future of employment: How susceptible are jobs to computerization?" *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, Elsevier, vol. 114(C), pages 254-280.

² Cecilia Amado, 'Future of work: 5 ways technology is reshaping work and the work place'(2020) <<https://allwork.space/2020/01/future-of-work-5-ways-technology-is-reshaping-work-and-the-workplace>>Accessed 12th April 2021

better work-life balance alongside of autonomy and flexibility while ensuing professional task achievement leading to a happy and a satisfied workforce, where on the same note allowing the employers to reduce their dependance and expenditure on physical infrastructures and to move into an effective online presence in the virtual world.

Another area that indicates the influence of technology in company management that has changed the way of traditional modes of working could be seen under the modernized role of a HR, where majority of companies are prompt to use IT tools for day today HR operations. For an example, compared to newspaper advertisements often used by HR Departments in earlier times, companies have now entered into the usage of online job portals as LinkedIn, Top-Jobs or even Facebook to attract the best candidates.

Furthermore, data management and record keeping has now become an easy task with paper free digital records that produces automated reports on employee progression that greatly assists HR in recruitment, conducting online interviews, performance evaluation, preparing pay-rolls, training, and development.

Hence, it could be noted that, technology works as the assistant helper for HR that guides the management to take well-informed decisions while reducing unnecessary job roles that may create a burden on company expenditures.

Technology, if utilized with strategic planning with a long term vision could boost up company growth, innovation, time efficiency and job enrichment while expanding company market, economic growth, operational efficiency, employee capabilities as well as improved customer experience by creating a motivating and a convenient work environment that supports its employees to reach company objectives in a well-opportune manner.

However, it is important to bear in mind that such sudden transition from manual labor to automation within a short span of time may also result in drawbacks that seeks attention for remedy aimed towards progression.

For an example, the generational gap in IT competency reflects the need for companies to train their employee carder to meet the needs of a contemporary business world. Resistance to change, high expenses on technological investments, costs for training could be named as more of such challenges faced by companies in adopting modern tech-work structures within their traditional organizational cultures.

Furthermore, it could be noted that the legal developments in the field of labor law and cyber law is rather moving in a slow pace compared to the rapid improvements in technological advancements, resulting minimum legal protection for new forms of employment models and work structures. When examining the general overview of statutory enactments that provides for the protection of employees in Sri Lanka, the Shop and Office Employees (Regulation of Employment & Remuneration) Act³, Wages Board Ordinance⁴, Factories Ordinance⁵, Industrial Disputes Act⁶, Workmen's Compensation Ordinance⁷, Trade Union Ordinance⁸(as amended), Maternity Benefits Ordinance⁹, Termination of Employment of Workmen (Special Provisions),Act¹⁰ holds a significant importance, as such outlines the legal framework that governs the minimum age for employment, minimum wages, regulation of work hour, maternity benefits and leave, payments to employees and Termination. Furthermore, the Employees Provident Fund Act No.15 of 1958, Employees Trust Fund Act No.46 of 1980, Payment of Gratuity Act No.12 of 1983, National Minimum Wages of Workers Act No.3 of 2016 and the Budgetary Relief Allowance Act No.4 of 2016 can be further named as relevant statutory regulations connected to the topic in discussion that provides protection in handling labor relations. In addition, it is to be noted that, Sri Lanka is also recognized as a well-known member of ILO (International Labor Organization) that mandates for the advancement of social and economic justice through the adherence of international labor standards.

³ Shop and Office Employees (Regulation of Employment & Remuneration) Act No.19 of 1954

⁴ Wages Board Ordinance No.27 of 1941

⁵ Factories Ordinance No.45 of 1942

⁶ Industrial Disputes Act No.43 of 1950

⁷ Workmen's Compensation Ordinance No.19 of 1934

⁸ Trade Union Ordinance No.14 of 1935

⁹ Maternity Benefits Ordinance No. 32 of 1939

¹⁰ Termination of Employment of Workmen (Special Provisions) Act No.45 of 1971

Interestingly, the Sri Lankan employment law does not distinguish between different categories of employment in its application as the statutes are made equally applicable to all categories of employments. However, in practice few modes of employee forms such as the Probationary Employees, where workers are employed subjected to a probation period under a contract of employment, Regular Employees who are employed under general contracts of employment, Casual Employees who are employed for a short-term needs basis, Seasonal Employees where workers are employed according to seasonal demands, and the Fixed-term employee carder who are enrolled for a fixed-term period is recognized as the main and traditional modes of employee recruitments.

Thus, on a close examination of Statuary provisions governing employee relations, one could note the room for improvements, particularly on the areas of new forms of work arrangements that swiftly gaining popular attention. For an example, the Shop and Office Employees Act¹¹ and the Wages Boards Ordinance¹² as the key regulatory frameworks governing the terms and conditions of employment in Sri Lanka recognizes eight hours as the standard working hour limit for a day and 45-48 hours¹³ as the weekly limit for normal work hours. Hence, notably the law does not expressly provide for a mechanism for the calculation of payments or a standard minimum payment method for the employees who are working for a lesser number of hours¹⁴, as the part-timers or freelancers. Hence, governments and relevant legal authorities are required to redress such ambiguities by making necessary amendments to facilitate the realization of maximum benefits of these technological perks of the modern world.

In conclusion under such subject matter, it could be noted that the technological infrastructure of a company greatly affects its company culture, competency, productivity, and inter-relations within company stakeholders. Both the employers and employees should embrace technological advancements in a pragmatic view that would assist them in preparation for a transformational future. Organizations are required

¹¹ Shop and Office Employees Act No. 19 of 1954

¹² Wages Boards Ordinance No. 27 of 1941

¹³ Yashoravi Bakmiwewa, 'How to amend the Sri Lankan labor law to include flexible working arrangements' International Labor Organization 2021 pg. 03

¹⁴ Ibid 13.

to redesign their work structure with a cohesive strategy that caters towards a sustainable future aligned with technology, while employees are required to invest in themselves on learning new skills to gain a competitive advantage in the labor market with an eye to the future.

The Elimination of Gender Based Wage Gap in Modern Industrial Relations

Equality between different gender roles has always been a core value upheld by the UN Charter since the year 1945 with the aim of empowering all women worldwide to rise up to their fullest potentials and to lead the community in a positive direction. However, in reality, despite various introductions of numerous international treaties based upon the themes of equality, human rights, and labor laws, yet majority of the world female population are still being subjected to direct and indirect discriminatory treatments, especially in the subject matter of employability, recruitment procedures and payments, where priority is often given to the played gender roles instead of talent or competency.

In simple terms, the definition of ‘gender wage gap’ relates to the notion of inequality that exists between the amount of earnings between a man and woman carrying out the same tasks that requires the same qualifications and competencies, held by both equally. It could be noted that such wage gap tends to further expand for most women of color, transgender as well as immigrant women who are often subjected to inequitable treatments¹⁵. According to research carried out by renowned academics in the field, it has been noted that, an average female worker earns \$530,000 lesser than a male due to such wage gap which clearly indicates the existing gender discrimination and unfair treatment against female workforce in the present labor markets. (IWPR 2016)¹⁶.

¹⁵ Elise Gould, Jessica Schieder, and Kathleen Geier, ‘What is the gender pay gap and is it real’(Economic Policy Institute 2016)<<https://www.epi.org/publication/what-is-the-gender-pay-gap-and-is-it-real/>>Accessed on 12th April 2021

¹⁶ Institute for Women’s Policy Research (2016) ‘Status of Women in the States’ < <https://statusofwomensdata.org/explore-the-data/employment-and-earnings/employment-and-earnings/>> Accessed on 11th April 2021

When examining the reasons for such disparities in payments, it could be seen that the gender wage gap is a result of many social factors that has been deeply uprooted in traditional societal thinking patterns. For an example, male dominated industries tend to hold higher wages while gender stereotype holds back women in freely choosing their dream career, by restricting them to occupy unpaid forms of work as homemaking and childbearing where such responsibilities disproportionately fall upon women due traditional customary practices. Such obligations vested upon the shoulders of women would compel female worker to shift into the part-time employee carder to balance work-home life, where the salaries and other benefits would be lower compared to a full time worker. Moreover, it is to be noted that men tend to negotiate their salary while women are more likely to be penalized for doing the same (Bowles, Babcock, and Lei 2006)¹⁷.

Another negative outcome of the existing wage gap based upon gender roles could be identified as the increased rate of poverty, low economic security and delayed economic growth that would affect the percentage of the standard of living conditions of each country.

When examining the universal initiatives taken by international organizations for the promotion of equal salary payments and for the creation of equal opportunities for women to engage in employment, SDG 2030 plays a major role in laying out the steppingstones towards achieving equality while condemning discrimination based upon gender and other similar grounds of prejudices. Accordingly, 5th goal of Sustainable Development (SDG) on gender equality, 8th goal on decent work and economic growth and moreover, the 10th goal on reduced inequalities, directly addresses the urgent need for the elimination of gender wage gap for the benefit of the global community. Notably, these attempts have made substantial progression towards mitigating payment disparities in certain countries, yet however, such journey is far away from attaining universal equality for all female workers in the field of equal payment and employment rights.

The Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against

Women (CEDAW, 1979)¹⁸, is another noteworthy attempt made towards addressing the existing gender discrimination against female workers, where it re-affirms the urgent necessity to adhere into the adoption of legal policies that reflects equality in salary payments.

It is important to note that, in reaching gender equality based upon wages, each company employer/firm or organization plays a crucial role that directly affects the minimization of gender wage gaps, whereby the companies could adopt healthy employment practices which aims toward the introduction of non-discriminatory company policies and regulations.

For an example, at the stage of recruitment, the companies could mitigate biasness against enrollment of female workers by celebrating diversity and integration. Furthermore, such practices could be incorporated into guidelines that reflects such company policies to ensure a gender-neutral recruitment process whereby the management is focused upon obtaining the best talent pool according to qualifications, regardless of gender disparities.

Furthermore, the use of skill based assessments, improving workplace flexibilities to accommodate its employees to maintain work-life balance, encouragement of salary negotiations assisted under HR operations, ensuring a transparent process of calculating increments and promotions, company policies that encourages shared parental leave, offering fair and equal salary payments for similar job roles, advertising of salary ranges at the initial stage of advertisements, adherence and adoption of legal requirements on wage payments issued by the government are few of such proactive steps a company could take, in acting as an advocate of gender equality in the community.

Furthermore, it is to be noted that, in consideration of the national level contribution towards attaining gender equality, each state at a government level holds a greater responsibility on ensuring the mitigation of gender wage gaps while adopting and implementing international standards on

¹⁸The Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women 1979.

equal payment polices and regulations.

For an example, government policies in Sweden requires all major companies to maintain pay audits where it analysis the adherence of national wage policies of such companies¹⁹. Furthermore, in Denmark, following its National Equal Pay Act of 2014, companies that fails to meet the needs of gender audits are fined by the government as a way of compelling organizations to follow national as well as international labor law principles in their day to day business operations towards a sustainable future.

Moreover, Canada, Switzerland, France are few more of such similar countries that have taken proactive measure through the introduction of national legislations²⁰, that has mandated companies to follow non-discriminatory approaches in payment of wages and other increments while observing the operations and implementation of legal requirements followed by such organizations for the benefit of female workforce of the country.

In such background, interestingly, Ireland in the year 2017 took the enactment of national legislations another step further, whereby it become the first ever country to introduce a legislation that required companies to prove equality in payments made by such organizations where, audits are being carried out to ensure the compliance of such legal components (Liz Alderman, 2017)²¹. Hence, it could be noted how Governments tends to lead by example by adopting fair and best practices that are often implemented in the public sector to promote transparency in salary payments directed towards instigating private sector to follow the same in order to achieve national economy progression.

Furthermore, as recommendations for the promotion of equal wages

¹⁹Jill Rubery, 'Is equal pay actually possible' (BBC News 2019) <<https://www.bbc.com/news/business-47212342>> Accessed on 10th April 2021

²⁰Ibid.

²¹ Liz Alderman (2017) 'Britain Aims to Close Gender Pay Gap with Transparency and Shame', New York Times. See also, Liz Alderman, "Equal Pay for Men and Women? Iceland Wants Employers to Prove It," The New York Times, March 28, 2017, available at <<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/28/business/economy/iceland-women-equal-pay.html>>

and payments, unionization can be used as an effective tool for collective bargaining, to combat against discriminatory company practices and to attain resolutions upon the themes of fair work conditions and salary increments.

Furthermore, going beyond legal policies, as a major step towards obtaining gender equality, the communities must confront the traditional mindsets and thinking patterns which often overlooks the competency of women and should acknowledge the true potentials of the female workforce and their equal contribution made towards national economy.

Furthermore, shifting the so-called 'accepted social norms' and cultural attitudes that confines household work solely on women should be modified to recognize the importance of both gender roles in maintaining a healthy family life, where it would create equal opportunities and would empower women to join the work force to support their families that would unilaterally results in improved living conditions.

As another way of acknowledging and recognizing the wage gap which exists between the male and female workforce, companies could conduct gender pay gap analysis and performance reviews in order to identify the key areas that requires urgent management attention on amending company policies, in order to ensure fair treatment to all its employees regardless of gender disparities.

For an example, company polices on paid maternity leave may supplement the retention of female workers after childbirth²², that would in return reduce the gender wage gap exists within the employee carder of the company. In the context of Sri Lanka, the Shop and Office Employees Act and the Maternity Benefits Ordinance sets out the regulations that facilitate such intention. However, it can be noted that one may come into the conclusion that such provisions are oblivious to certain dynamics of flexible work arrangements of the modern era and as such holds room for

²² Esteban Ortiz Ospina, ' Why is there a gender gap' (2018) < <https://ourworldindata.org/what-drives-the-gender-pay-gap>> Accessed on 9th April 2021

further modifications²³.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it could be noted that, according to the existing trends of employability and discrepancies in the payment of salaries, it would take more than 70 years for the world to eliminate gender wage gap (ILO 2016)²⁴, which showcases the seriousness of the issue as it directly negates the efforts of upholding human rights and female empowerment in the community. Hence, the duty to ensure fair competition and equal treatment upon payment of wages is a shared responsibility held by companies, governments, civil societies, as well as the international community, as we all are heading towards a rights-based future where each and every individual is respected regardless of one's differences in sexual orientation, color, religion, or ethnicity.

²³ Yashoravi Bakmiwewa, 'How to amend the Sri Lankan labor law to include flexible working arrangements' International Labor Organization 2021 pg. 04

²⁴ The World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Report 2020 < <https://www.weforum.org/reports/gender-gap-2020-report-100-years-pay-equality>> Accessed on 13th April 2021