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The Job Market Is In Dire Need Of Green Energy Professionals: Are We Ready For The Shift?

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 Anupama Ratta, Head, HR, TPREL.



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 by BW Online Bureau

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The new term 'green jobs' might sound a bit puzzling. But, if you haven't heard of it before, it's an interesting new word to describe all jobs that involve the role of environmental sustainability and its restoration.

As per the World Economic Forum report, at COP26, India pledged to achieve net zero emissions by the year 2070. A recent report published by the Council of Energy, Environment and Water, Natural Resources Defense Council and Skill Council for Green jobs FY21, mentions that the sector employed workforce of 111,400, of which, Solar employs around 77% and the balance 23% are employed in Wind. India can potentially create about 3.4 million jobs in this sector by 2030. The opportunities are immense. The sector will open up multi-disciplinary role opportunities, and a high volume of talent will be needed to further our climate change commitments on the world stage.

While the outlook is exciting, talent managers in organizations in the green energy sector have a task cut out for them – the war for talent is only getting more fierce, coupled with limited experienced talent in niche areas such as Manufacturing, Engineering & Technology, Wind energy, etc. Ensuring availability of knowledgeable and experienced talent, with the required green competencies, in the shortest possible time, is imperative to ensure organizations are able to leverage the huge opportunity in the sector.

Renewable energy momentum encourages green job openings

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As of the end of 2022, the Government of India disseminated highlights that India is the world's third largest producer of renewable energy, with 40% of its capacity coming from non-fossil fuel. By the year 2030, we target to achieve 50% of our generation through renewable sources, which is 500 GW.

While utility-scale projects in Wind and Solar are creating several green job openings, there is expected to be high requirement for talent in two more areas – decentralized renewable sources such as Rooftop Solar, as well as Solar Manufacturing.

The distributed nature of the Rooftop Solar business has the potential to generate higher volume of green jobs as compared to Utility Scale projects. And it's not just the volume of jobs that is increasing, it is also the need for newer competencies such as Channel Management, Key Account Management, Brand Management, etc, for organizations to make that shift, and aggressively compete for a larger share of the pie in a highly competitive market, with a high percentage of unorganized players. Organizations are increasingly looking at building these consumer-forward capabilities by hiring from other industries, for example, from companies with fairly well-developed Channel Management muscle.

On the manufacturing front, most of the key players in the industry are planning to add significant manufacturing capacity in both Cell and Module Manufacturing by 2025, which will create job opportunities in the immediate future, both for skilled and unskilled workforce.

With limited solar manufacturing capacity today, talent in this space is scarce, especially in niche areas in Cell Manufacturing and Technology. Organizations today are open and willing to recruit talent with what we call "transferable" skills from adjacent industries such as automobile, process industries such as pharmaceutical, chemicals, etc. Organizations are investing in structured development of these professionals to make them "green role" ready. They are also increasingly accessing global talent in this space, especially in areas of Technology.

Taking this energy transition closer to community

RE projects are located primarily in remote areas, and there is tremendous opportunity to include India's rural communities in this green energy transition, by equipping them with the necessary skill sets to access these jobs. Organizations have designed "Earn while you Learn" Programs that offer Bachelor in Vocational Education to 12thStd/ITI students in Renewable energy technology. This strategy to include local communities not only provides an opportunity to young talent to continue their education and support their families but is also good for business – generating a pool of trained technicians from the local communities helps in the retention of talent.

Additionally, there is opportunity for organizations to forge strategic partnerships with various stakeholders, including government bodies, for both mobilization and skilling of rural communities at scale. This will not only help organizations develop a skilled talent pool to meet their talent requirements, but also contribute to the larger cause of building employability in the regions that they operate.

Today, Learning and Development Heads of organizations are supporting business growth by contributing in creating industry – ready talent. They are exploring opportunities to embed "green skill training" in the academic curriculums in ITI, Diploma and BTech courses, which will help significantly accelerate the learning curve of trainees who join an organization. This is extremely important in a business where time is critical, most projects get completed in 6 months' time or lesser, and it is important to ensure talent is trained well enough to be productive on the job as quickly as possible.

Reskilling and upskilling of existing workforce

With increased focus on the shift to renewable energy, organizations are investing on reskilling and upskilling of existing workforce to ensure that trained employees are continuously aligned with the evolving requirements of the industry. This not just ensures ready availability of talent to support growth, but provides employees an opportunity to upgrade their skills and advance their careers in a high potential sector. More importantly, these employees, having worked in the organization for a period of time, would have developed their knowledge and understanding of organizational systems and processes, as well as culture.

Forward-looking organisations are building capacities in the green jobs sector by running in-house academies, to equip their employees in digital skills, project management, sales, and customer service skills, preparing them to meet future challenges.

Women in Green Energy

While women in India constitute 48% of our population, their contribution to GDP is 18%, hence it is only obvious that increasing participation of women in the workforce has the potential to have a significant positive impact on our GDP. It is interesting to note that today, of the students enrolled for higher education in India, 48% are women. That only indicates that women are increasingly opting to

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pursue their higher education, and it is now upon us to reach out to them with opportunities and provide them with a safe and inclusive workplace that helps them achieve their aspirations.

While there are many changes in the industry, there are interesting changes observed within organizations, especially pertaining to promoting gender balance in an industry where most roles have been held by men. Hiring managers are increasingly willing to recruit women in roles traditionally held by men, and this is being integrated in their annual hiring plans. Managers are increasingly open to hiring women from other industries and investing in their development, even if they don't fit the role or educational requirements to the "T". Companies are deploying strategies such as mandating 30-50% hiring of women trainees from campus. However, this is only the first step towards promoting this gender balance. HR Leaders have to manage this change holistically, with focus on policies and processes to ensure safety of women, enable life-stage transition, encourage upskilling and re-skilling, ensure opportunities for growth through providing exposure and entrusting them with higher responsibilities, while supporting their overall health and wellbeing.

The growth in Solar manufacturing is opening up a new set of opportunities for women. Companies are targeting recruitment of women across workforce segments, with the targeted gender ratio ranging from 30% to almost 80% of women. With the expansion planned in Manufacturing, there is potential to add almost 1500 women to the workforce for every 4-5 GW of added capacity. This will provide opportunities to women, especially in rural areas, and contribute to women's empowerment in a big way.

The role of the CSO

When 5 of the World Economic Forum's top 10 risks of 2020 were environmental in nature, 72% of top management respondents of Deloitte's global survey expressed that the role of a Chief Sustainability Officer will be distinct and predominant. In the same report, about 99% of respondents expressed that role of Chief Sustainability Officer will grow in prominence by 2023. This means that the future holds space for dedicated teams working within the organisation to optimise its functions in synchronicity with our climate change objectives.

Outlook for the future

The green job market is as hot as it could get. Everyone needs experts, competent to take the green energy agenda forward. From automobile companies, to pharma industry, to plastic manufacturers, textile makers, recyclers and food-tech giants, all companies want green professionals to support them in achieving their clean energy targets, and meeting the guidelines the Government has set for the manufacturing and services sector.

In my view, this is possibly the best time for those who are passionate about upgrading their skills and being a part of this green energy transition. But it is an even better time for talent professionals, who have a unique opportunity in front of them to directly contribute to this very significant transition, by devising innovative talent strategies.

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