
A Conceptual Analysis of Effective Gig Works System for Sustainable Employment in Challenging Times

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Abstract: World today is having a crisis on global health issue and business environment's uncertainty that significantly affected people's income and survival. Further, job losses and unemployment are among the problems that influence the ability of the community to fulfil their household needs and wants. One way to manage the crisis is by providing employment opportunities that offer a stable income for the household to meet their financial expenses from time to time. In Malaysia, the Bottom 40 (B40) community group is the most affected by the current economy situation. The higher cost of living and lower level wages rate also add to the struggle of the community to live their life and forced the people to find an alternative work to survive the increased financial expenses. Gig-economy is an emerging labour market where the employer engages with the independent employees for short term contracts or also known as a freelancer. This new employment trend offers potentials for job creations to solve unemployment issue in the community especially during the challenging times. The underlying assumptions of four established theories in human resources management field are used to guide the articulation of the proposed framework. A conceptual analysis for an effective gig works system towards sustainable income for the community is discussed based on the current situations and Malaysian contextual elements.

Keywords: gig economy, household income, digitalization, sustainable employment, talent management, Malaysia

1. INTRODUCTION

Half of Malaysians are reported to earn below RM2000 per month with the median income RM1703 for all wage-earners in Malaysia. This amount is not sufficient with the compulsory need of the standard cost of living in Malaysia that include food, clothing, transport and shelter that should be on average from RM2700 to RM6500 per month depending on the household's necessities (Chong & Khong, 2018). Take into account this figure, there is a strong reason on how the gig works helps the Malaysians in earning more income to fulfil the acceptable living standard. Gig works allows the workers to have more than one works to

have the side incomes besides the mandatory monthly salary they earn. That's how the gig economy exists in Malaysia with the variety of jobs such as the food rider, online sellers and other freelancer jobs.

From the perspective of human resource management, the gig economy is a trend that pushes aside the normal employment relationship between employee and employer. The identifiable employer-employee relationship within the organization is absent. The intermediary platforms firms in the gig economy design and implement a variety human resource management activities as in performance management with the purpose on having the gig workers with high performance to meet specific standards of work that should be done by the respected gig workers (Lee, Kusbit, Metsky&Dabbish, 2015).

The use of people-based systems that emphasize on using the employer or manager for talent selection, evaluation and placement is argued to be better as compared to just using the assessment tools alone that may be bias and not compatible with the actual character of the selected employees (Li, Hedayati-Mehdiabadi, Choi, Wu & Bell, 2018). Accordingly, most companies executed two types of talent management programs: exclusive and inclusive. Exclusive talent management is the policies and practices in which the organization focuses on limited numbers of high potential and performs employees with identified talents. Meanwhile, inclusive talent management is the program that involves the employees as whole. There were ethical issues raised in the exclusive talent management that leads to an absence of justice in the organization with the negative effects such as low employee engagement and high employee turnover rates by the unselected high potential employees (O'Connor & Crowley-Henry, 2017).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Talent Management and Its Significant To Current Environment

Talent management is the program to create the talent pool of people with the right skills and competencies to perform the right jobs at the right time within the right organization (Cappelli & Keller, 2014). It involves activities and processes of systematic identification of key positions that contribute to the organization goals (Colling&Mellahi, 2009). This process is usually conducted during workforce planning to meet the future needs of employees in the organization (Li *et al.*, 2018). The Human Resource department is responsible for managing the talents among employees that are compatible with the needs of the company in terms of the job scope. Talent management involves the development of high-potentials and high-performing employees to fill the roles of job positions with the development of differentiated human resource practices to facilitate the selection of right candidates to fill the positions. The chosen candidates need to be able to perform as good as the competent incumbents in order to ensure the continuity of commitment to the organizations.

The main purpose of talent management is to create differentiation in the organization as compared to the others. This would assist the organization to gain the competitive advantage against their competitors. As the organization survival requires a long-term lifeline in the business environment, having the talented employees will enable the organization to have

smooth operation to get the desirable organisational outcomes (Maurya & Agarwal, 2018). Employees are known as assets to the organization and thus the talented employees will be valuable for their high capability and competencies to assist organizations in realizing the strategy significant to the organization success. Talent management programs become one of the most effective tools to keep employees stay engaged and committed with their work and company in the long run as they feel belonging and associated with the organization that gives improvements and fully utilizes their skills and talent (Pandita& Ray, 2018).

Talent management involves three main requirements for the plan to succeed. First, everyone's talent in the organization has to be used and developed. Second, talent management aimed to provide increasingly agile, flat and innovative organizations with the talents that suit with the employees that related with the customer based works. Third, it involves the strategic approach in ensuring that talent management contributes to the organizations in terms of development based on their own capabilities in achieving the organization's goals and objectives (Schreuder&Noorman, 2019). These requirements are tailored to optimise the potential of each talent in the organization and not solely based on existence skills shown by the senior employees. It is reported that many employers were unaware of their employees' potential until they have talent management (Mayo, 2018). Having different kinds of employees with a variety of talents helps the companies to grow.

Talent management involved employer branding that related with the rewards and remuneration, recruitment and work-life balance initiative (Maurya *et al.*, 2018). The challenges faced by the employers was on finding the talents with the sustainable development that somehow lay on the practices in talent management since some practices have effects towards unhealthy situations and environments towards the employees motivations and other inner peace (Mwila&Turay, 2018).

Although with its potential, talent management also has been debated for its ethical issues. This includes issues related to the standards of respect, dignity, equality and sustaining employees' career development (Painter-Morland, Kirk, Deslandes&Tansley, 2019). This suggests that the talent management research may overlook the perception of the employees in developing mutual needs between individual employees and organizational goals. This gap of perception may influence the effectiveness of the talent management program to grow employees' potential for the competitiveness of the organization.

2.2 Gig Economy

Gig economy is an alternative work arrangement that grows fastest although it starts from small sectors (Katz & Krueger, 2016; Murray & Ball, 2016). The jobs in the gig economy let the workers to diversify their income through many sources and enable the workers to have a wide variety of job niches in freelancing (Kuhn, 2016). At the same time, this new employment allows consumers to have their demanded product or services by the independent workers not necessarily permanent employees from the company that offer those products (Duhaimie&Woessner, 2019).

Gig economy refers to the existence of the less structured work arrangements with flexible jobs that use online applications as the main platforms using the smartphone or other web

applications to connect between the employers, gig workers and customers directly (Abraham, Haltiwanger, Sandusky & Spletzer, 2018). This is done through the match between demand and supply through online interactions between the company and gig workers. The gig economy includes the collection of markets that match suppliers to shoppers which will be completed by the gig workers. This approach is known as a support to on-demand commerce. In the basic work arrangement, gig workers enter into formal agreements with on-demand firms to produce services to company's purchasers. Prospective purchasers request services through Internet-based technological platform or smartphone application that enables them to look for suppliers or to specify jobs.

The concept of gig work brought huge benefits to the people especially those who are struggling with financial difficulties nowadays. Providers (gig workers) engaged by the on-demand company offer the requested service and are paid for the jobs (Donovan, Bradley, & Shimabukuro, 2016). Due to that, gig workers have no long-term connection to a particular business and services as they are employed only on particular tasks with defined time (Abraham *et al.*, 2016). Thus, people could plan for their work depending on their financial needs. The more gig works offered through online platforms, the more job opportunities to be grabbed by the community. Gig economy promises a flexible work schedule with self-directed workplace and limitless earnings by using the app-enabled work (Ravenelle, 2019). The jobs are taken using an application that eases the movement of the gig workers with the job orders because it will be available via online transactions and offers high accessibility of customers as well. The flexibility in the gig economy gives freedom to the gig workers to fulfil their job remotely as compared to the traditional full time jobs.

The gig workers are able to diversify their source of income through many side ventures but mostly not in their field of talents. The tasks that are often available to the gig workers today mostly come from the online platforms (Duhaime *et al.*, 2019). The employees in the gig economy have a wide range of works in different contexts. For instance, common traditional work in the gig economy includes occasional work such as babysitting or flea market selling (Collinsy, Garinz., Jacksonx, Koustas & Payne, 2019). There are four classes of work in the gig economy under alternative work arrangement: independent contractors, independent consultants or freelance workers, on-call workers and daily workers who provide service based on the contract. Independent contractors are those who are not employed by the firms they work but legally self-employed with the firms on freelance basis terms. On-call workers are only being called as needed and temporarily helped with the service as arranged by the agent. Lastly, daily workers are the workers provided by the contract firms.

Based on some challenges of the implementation of gig works in the labour market, the issue raised on how far the gig workers were equipped by necessary skills and competencies for them to be able to perform their jobs. In particular, their performances are crucial in determining the satisfaction of the customers. Further, the motivation of the gig workers could be another issue to be explored as to understand the reason for them to do gig works despite their lack of experience in performing new jobs. This is an alarming issue because the employers of gig works are reported to have low control of service quality on employees' performance in the gig economy (Duhaime *et al.*, 2019).

The appointment of gig workers in the company is not merely about bringing down the costs for the company or just a fast-tracking process to get the workers. The employers need to involve the gig workers in the talent management planning so that the quality of the service is not compromised as the company used different gig workers. Currently, not only small companies are involved in the implementation or hiring of gig workers as it also involves the big company especially in service delivery companies with the flexible work hours (Gaskell, 2017).

2.3 Important Considerations In The Gig Economy

Gig economy has effects on the norms of consumers and workers especially in the service-based organizations. It transforms the relationship between employees and employers that arise on the point of different sides of expectations on both sides (Duhaime *et al.*, 2019). This is because both parties are temporarily connected according to the available jobs offers. After the job is completed, the connection between them will be automatically dissolved. This new work configuration is likely to offer high potentials for the community including Malaysia as the country is moving towards developing a digital nation to be in line with the advancement of technology and digitalization that has been spread worldwide (Mat Ali *et al.*, 2020).

The workers that enjoy the gig economy identified it as the fewer pull factors as reasons to be able to work on a long-term period in the company with self-reported works and life satisfaction (Keith, Harms, & Tay, 2019). The organizations can support the self-motivation of the gig workers by the integration of using the social media tools and digital platform to ease the access to a variety of works (Jabagi, Croteau, Audebrand & Marsan, 2019). To encourage workers innovations, creativity and entrepreneur sense, the managerial assumptions and correlated behaviours can be utilized (Ravenelle, 2019).

The environments that cultivate the connections of the gig workers to the task they do and keeping their self-bound are routines, spaces, people and purpose. The routines that they perform daily may increase the skills they perceive to have as in knowledgeable and experts gig workers. Spaces needed by the gig workers to express their creativity towards the task and somehow the spaces given may increase the productivity of the task itself. The people related in the gig works comprising the job provider, manager and colleagues supports the emotions of the gig workers to have a more conducive and safe environment as they have the support system to strengthen their task well. In terms of purpose, the gig workers have the awareness that their main responsibility must be fulfilled in completing the task they perceived to finish as whole. Other than that, researchers suggested that the factors of constraints, confine, reassure and orientation would help in managing gig workers' emotions to work and be more productive and viable (Petriglieri, Ashford, & Wrzesniewski, 2019). The constraints they had in completing the task will be the challenges for them to produce more creative ways of performing the tasks. The constraints may come from the limited time, lack of energy and the tools needed in the task. The confinement also gives the spaces for the gig workers to express their brighter ideas in completing the tasks. The reassurance comes from the environment that supports the job workers that may come from the bearable workload, supportive colleagues and enough sources needed. The orientation was helping to introduce

the job workers towards the tasks and explain the specific items needed to produce high quality of the completed tasks.

The culture and legal norms of gig works involve limiting the relationship of the workers and the employer as it is embedded within different interpersonal networks (Wood, Graham, Lehdonvirta & Hjorth, 2019). In organizations, the gig worker is an independent employee who is not entitled for many standard employment benefits. Most gig workers have limited cover and support from the employer in terms of personal, social and economic that creates anxieties among them (Williams & Lebsack, 2019). Putting the gig works at disadvantage as norms, the using of compensation based on productivity can help the gig workers in future and at the same time challenge the permanent employees in the organization who got the benefit to improve their performance (Cook, Diamond, & Oyer, 2019).

Gig economy involved the employment relationship, skill content and geography of the jobs from the effect of the technological change. Using the online platform, it involves a process of searching, monitoring and remoting the collaboration between gig workers and any particular employer in ensuring the job is done (Kassi & Lehdonvirta, 2016). Further, gig economy can be one platform that helps the people with low opportunity in the entrepreneurial field to avoid the risk in business by having other sources of income (Carnahan & Greenwood, 2016). Gig workers are flexible yet having a new experience on the job learning without taking judgment on gender gap (Cook, *et al.*, 2018).

3. THEORIES

The underlying assumptions of well-established theories are explored to link between talent management and online employment matters related to gig works in enhancing its potential to provide sustainable income and solve financial difficulties among communities. In particular, there are few established theories in human resource management that are particularly useful to integrate between talent management and a new trend of gig economy. These theories offer the understanding of employment matters that is considered important for employers as well as employees. The mutual benefits for both parties are crucial to be considered to ensure the new work configuration can contribute to individual and organizational achievement, not only to solve the problem immediately, but to sustain in the long run. Among the theories are psychological contract theory, AMO theory, expectancy theory and goal setting theory.

3.1 Psychological Contract Theory

Rousseau's concept of the psychological contract theory is defined as an individual's belief on terms and conditions of a reciprocal exchange between that person and another party or parties (Rousseau, 1989). This theory describes the comparison between employee's contributions towards the organization and the employer's expectations of the employees as an exchange for the employment relations (Heuvel *et al.*, 2016). Psychological contract theory consists of three main dimensions which are transactional, relational and balance contracts (Zupan, Dziewanwska, & Pearce, 2017).

Transactional contract is described by the employees with limited and short-term exchange which is mostly focusing on materialistic return with the documented or written agreement as the evidence. The relationship between employer and employees is well stated on expected performance terms in a short term period.

Next, relational contracts assume the employees with continuous, long-term insight and are not restricted to economic exchange and usually interpret subjectively by the employer. This kind of employee has great bonding with the employer as well as the organization as they feel obligated to their works and have a high feeling of belongings to the organizations. The relationship was open-ended with loose performance terms as they more emphasize on trust and good faith principles.

The third dimension is a balance contract is the employees that have a combination of transactional and relational contract. The employment relationship is often very flexible based on the internal and external environments and circumstances. It may be strict in one time but can change to be lenient in another times depending on the relationship and situations that help the employees. It discusses employees expectations that can be fulfilled by the employer. So, the achievement of the balance contract varies and depending on the situation whether it leans towards the transactional or relational.

3.2 AMO Theory

AMO theory discusses three main elements in human resource management practices: ability, motivation and opportunities. This theory suggests that in ensuring employee performance, employees need to have necessary skills and knowledge (ability), forces that can drive them to perform jobs (motivation) and support from the organization (opportunities). AMO influence in employees performance is viewed as more complicated than expected. This happens due to the dependence of those elements not only on the existence of a set of HRM practices as a content, but also based on the perceptions of the employees about the practices. The perceptions of employee as a role holder is important to be considered by the organization to ensure that the message from the management through HRM practices is interpreted similarly by employees at the work floor (Mat et al., 2017). Thus, AMO theory assumes that well designed human resource practices alone did not guarantee an overall acceptance of employees on the formulated practices. It requires an effective implementation of those practices that will have a mutual understanding between employer and employees (Bainbridge, 2015; Ozcelik&Uyargil, 2015; Mat et al., 2017).

Based on the core assumptions of the theory, AMO has been widely used to examine how the high performance work system can help the organization to improve the employee's performance as a whole (Marin-Garcia & Tomas, 2016). These underlying assumptions is relevant to cater a new nature of digital employment that is yet to have a standard procedures to be referred to. Researchers also highlighted the need to consider a new skills and knowledge in the new era of digitalization and gig economy for better engagement with the new labour environment (Malik, Budhwar, & Srikanth, 2020). Implementing the required changes are necessary to ensure the accomplishment of the individual and organization goals in the new digital labour market. In Malaysia, the change is required in terms of bridging the

digital gap between rural and urban community in order to ensure overall achievement for the economic development in the community.

3.3 Expectancy Theory

Expectancy theory of motivation is used to explain the reasons for employees' performance that is influenced by their expected outcomes that are identified as rewards. This theory comprises three main elements which are expectancy, instrumentality and valence. This theory suggests that employees will be highly motivated and work harder if they believe that their effort will result in a good performance that leads to a great and satisfying reward. The satisfying reward can be defined as a situation if employees perceive that their work effort is worth the rewards they gain (Purvis, Mccray&Zagenczyk, 2014). To simplify the understanding of this theory, the theoretical equation that has been used is;

$$\text{Motivation force} = \text{Expectancy} \times \text{Instrumentality} \times \text{Valence}$$

Expectancy is the belief that the employee's effort will bring out the ideal objective which is largely dependent on their past experience, self- assurance and how difficult the objective and goals are to accomplish. Instrumentality explains the employee's belief that they will receive specific rewards if they are able to perform as expected. This belief can be developed based on three factors: trust, control, and policies. Trust in who chooses the reward and it's winner; control is related to the leadership process in the event there is no trust, and policies rely on strategies that clearly describe how any action will prompt reward. The last element of valence is about the value that employees place on the expected rewards. This is controlled by the necessities, objectives, qualities, preferences, and sources of inspiration of the worker. In view of the connection between those three elements, employees will pick the alternatives that give them the highest motivation. The higher expectation for each factor, the higher will be the employee's motivation to perform their jobs (Nimri, Bdair& Al-Bitar, 2015). From this understanding, employers could drive the motivation of their employees towards rewards that can benefit an individual employee as well as the organization as a whole. To get a long term achievement, organizations need to be able to disseminate rewards that are worth the employee's effort, and individualize rewards based on what employees perceive. A few employees may lean towards an advancement or increase in salary, though others may incline toward extra get-away days, improved advantages, day care, or senior consideration offices (De Simone, 2015). Thus, it is important for both employers to consider the employee's voice towards driving them to be motivated in assisting organization to accomplish their goals.

3.4 Goal Setting Theory

Goal setting theory explains the linkage between organizational goal setting with employee's job performance. This is done accordingly to each and every specific goal that is appropriate for achieving higher performance. It defines the actual directions for the employees and how much efforts need to be put in that particular work. In this theory, it describes the need to

motivate the employees based on four elements of specificity, commitment, challenge and feedback.

First, specificity is defined as the clarity of the set goals to produce greater output and performance. The goal clarity can be viewed as unambiguous, quantifiable and timeliness objectives to be achieved by employees and avoid misunderstanding. Second, commitment is the level of assurance employees use to accomplish the set objective. There are two fundamental factors that influence the commitment: significance and self-efficacy. The reasons an individual has for achieving an objective, including anticipating certain results, explains the level of significance. On the other hand, an employee's conviction on their ability to accomplish the objective is self-efficacy. Third, the degree of challenge ought to be specific for every individual that could drive their motivation. The more challenging an objective is, the more focused the employees will become. Fourth element of feedback, is defined as the necessity to know about their current performance. Employees will require input on how well they performed to achieve the objectives. Feedback can enable a worker to figure out what they have done and what they need to do. The faster the feedback is, the quicker that employees can improve their performance accordingly to the organization's standard (Bersona, Halevy, Shamir & Erez, 2014)

4. FRAMEWORK

Based on reviews of four prominent theories in the management field, this paper suggests the integration of these theories into the development of an effective gig work system towards sustainable employment for the employees. The underlying assumptions of psychological contract theory, AMO theory, expectancy theory and goal setting theory are used to explain the relevant work configuration that potentially works in the gig economy as its nature differs with that of ordinary work employment. The main goal of the proposed work system is to consider the mutual benefit of employers and employees. This is to ensure the creation of a better sense of belonging among gig workers towards the job although they are not bound with one permanent employer. The idea is to ensure the job they serve satisfies the customers as well as the organization that demands their services. Therefore, the proposed gig work system proposed in this paper is illustrated in Figure 1.

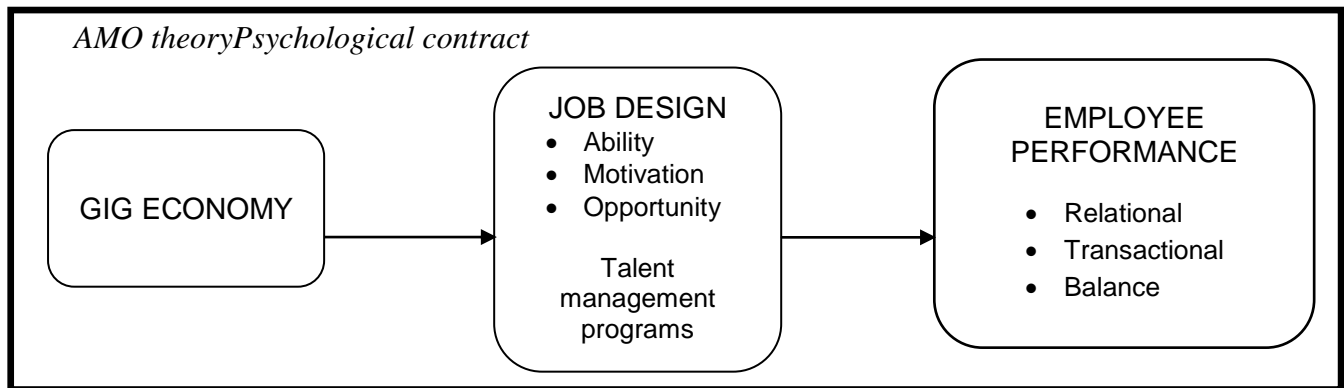


Figure 1: Proposed Gig Work Employment System

Based on the framework, the impact of the gig economy to the job creation can be articulated into the job design and talent management program. This will largely apply the elements of AMO theory in the sense of determining the gig workers ability, motivation and opportunities. Talent management programs can be viewed as part of the job design in order to tailor each and every capability with that of available jobs offered in the gig economy market. The ability of the workers will be determined through their skills in order to complete the related tasks offered in the market. In discussing about gig works, the ability to use technology and online system are mandatory for potential workers because all the transaction in terms of work demand and supply are being made through online platform. Meanwhile, the motivation of the workers will be measured by the achievement they made in a specified time frame. The drive to manage the increased cost of living with the household expenses would be the highest motivation of the people in the challenging times. This is especially true considering the impact of Covid-19 pandemic that has been detrimental for many businesses. Consequently, many people are losing their jobs and income which contribute to more difficulties to survive in the current economic time. Opportunities for the workers are assessed through the employer' ability to provide support and assistance that can improve the performance and quality of job completed by the gig workers. Other than employer who offers gig works, the opportunity should also be viewed as part of the responsibility of the government and local authority for the sake of economic and social development in all parts of the country. In Malaysia, the creation of job opportunity is even more important due to the gap that has been reported between urban and rural areas (Mat Ali et al., 2020). Realizing the potentials of small businesses in the rural areas that are quite promising, the platform of gig works system could optimise the current achievement made by those businesses by integrating their work operations with the digital system. Therefore, the effort to bridge the digital gap between urban and rural community is crucial for the gig works employment system to work well. This is because all potential workers need to be familiarise with the technology before they can be part of the player in the digital labour market.

Talent management program will come into place as employer try to match between skills owned by gig workers who have previously provide services for the purpose to build a long

term relationship or repetition of services. Those good quality services shown by gig workers that have satisfied the employer will be identified in the database for more continuous offer afterward. This kind of relationship will benefited both employer and employee in job matching process. Employer will be able to improve the efficiency of the work activities of their company. Similarly, employee will be benefited in terms of sustaining their income through continuous demand of services from the same employer.

Employee performance in the gig work system can be monitored based on the underlying assumptions of psychological contract theory. This will involve all elements of transactional, relational and balance contracts. The transactional part is viewed through the effectiveness of the organization that offers the gig works to identify the requirement before any job can be offered. This is because the transactional element concerns the relationship between employer and employees that is based on the contract. Although both parties are not permanently bound, however this requirement is important to provide equal rights for employees. In relational part, this study proposes the need for an open and long term relationship between gig workers and organizations should there be any repetition of the same jobs occurring in the future. This is particularly important in discussing sustainable employment in a challenging time. As discussed earlier, most workers are involved in the gig economy due to the increased cost of living and uncertain business environment. So, the element of balance explains how far that both transactional and relational relationship influence the gig workers' performance. This is especially important as people in Malaysia struggled to manage the household incomes and pay their debts (Sabri et al., 2020). However, at the same time the issue of work life balance is also to be considered to achieve the quality of work and personal life.

Basic concepts of expectancy theory can be applied to convince employees of the system used by the organization that offers gig works as to satisfy the needs of both parties. Based on the nature of the gig economy, the satisfaction can be translated into the job flexibility that employees have based on their work preferences and how the job can fulfill their needs. This could be integrated with the goal setting theory as it links the performance with the specific goals. In order to provide mutual benefits for employer and employees, organizations' strategic goals and priorities require due consideration in formulating the employment system. This is particularly true as research showed that organization's strategic priorities influence the development of people management practices that related to talent management program (Mat & Barrett, 2017). Having the elements of goal setting theory is therefore relevant to ensure the effectiveness of the proposed gig work system in order to establish a connection between sustainable employment to employees and business survival for the employer.

5. CONCLUSION

Digitalization and technological advancement have largely influenced many aspects of human life including employment matters. The increased cost of living and higher uncertainties in the business environment, locally and globally, also push the labour market towards many changes to survive in challenging times. An effective work system for gig works is important to ensure this new employment type could bring benefits to the

community in the long run. Scholars also noted on the potential of gig economy as part of the economic development strategy. The effective work system is not only important as a reference for the related parties involved with the gig economy, but it shapes the formulation of suitable HRM practices to cater differences in this digital employment as compared to ordinary employment. While the new trend of gig economy is yet to be governed by any specific rules and procedures, the proposed framework attempts to pave a way to kick start the formulation of standard procedures for digital works. This is aimed to guarantee equal right to both employer and employees. Further, effectiveness of the system can be assessed through its ability to sustain in the long run and bring potential to the community by preparing them to be independent in managing their household income and expenses without solely depending on the government's assistance. In Malaysia, this framework could support the realisation of Digital Malaysia idea that give emphasis on 'Microsourcing the B40s' and enable this group of community to increasingly participate in the digital economy for sustaining their lives. This paper proposes a gig work system for sustainable employment for the community; further empirical investigation is needed to examine the effectiveness of the proposed framework.

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