

Green Jobs and the Just Transition: Why HR Must Lead the Next Transformation

Across industries, sustainability is no longer just a regulatory or branding consideration—it is becoming a fundamental business transformation. Global institutions such as the International Labour Organization estimate that the transition toward greener economies could generate **24 million new jobs worldwide by 2030**, while reshaping the skills required across almost every sector. For Philippine organizations, this shift raises an important leadership question:

How do we transition responsibly—while ensuring our people, capabilities, and culture evolve alongside the business?

This is where the concept of the **Just Transition** becomes critical.

I. What the “Just Transition” Means for Organizations

Recently, discussions at the HR Summit on Green Jobs—organized by Employers Confederation of the Philippines through its Assist program—highlighted collaboration between government, global institutions, and

employers. Participants included the International Labour Organization and the Department of Labor and Employment, emphasizing frameworks that help companies align workforce development with sustainability goals.

The **Just Transition Framework** recognizes that climate and sustainability initiatives must also protect livelihoods and enable workers to adapt to new economic realities. At its core, it focuses on three priorities: 1) **Reskilling and upskilling workers** for emerging green jobs, 2) **Ensuring inclusive workforce transitions** as industries evolve, and 3) **Embedding sustainability into organizational strategy and governance**

Alongside this, the **Human Resource Development (HRD) Framework for Green Jobs** promoted by the DOLE emphasizes that talent development will be central to the country’s sustainability journey.

In other words, the transition to sustainability is not only technological— it is deeply human.

II. Understanding Green Jobs and Green Skills

The International Labour Organization defines **green jobs** as work that contributes to preserving or restoring the environment while providing decent employment conditions.

These jobs can exist across multiple industries, including: 1) Renewable energy and energy efficiency, 2) Sustainable manufacturing and supply chains, 3) Waste management and circular economy initiatives, and 4) Green infrastructure and climate-resilient agriculture.

An insight from the 2026 NRI Outlook Report states that the influence of the “green jobs” trend allows the broader movement of companies embedding sustainability at the core of their strategic imperatives and this heightens the demand for environmental stewardship aligned with “green jobs” (i.e. jobs that protect the environment from adverse impacts through resource efficiency).

However, the conversation is not limited to entirely new roles. Many existing positions will **require capability building in these priority skills as mentioned in our 2026 NRI Outlook Report**: 1) ESG Strategy and Governance, 2) Environmental Data Literacy & ESG Reporting, 3) Risk Identification & Operational Resilience Planning, and 4) Ethical & Responsible Business Leadership

In practice, this means that **executive teams, finance teams, operations leaders, engineers, and HR professionals alike will need to integrate sustainability thinking into everyday decisions.**

III. The First Leadership Question: Do We Have the Capabilities Today?

Before launching sustainability initiatives, organizations need a clear understanding of their **current workforce readiness.**

Key questions leaders should consider include:

- Do we have the **technical and leadership capabilities** needed for sustainability initiatives?
- Which existing roles can be **transitioned or reskilled** into green functions?
- Are our **talent development programs aligned** with future sustainability priorities?
- Do our employees understand **why sustainability matters to the business**?

*For many organizations, the gap is not simply about hiring new specialists—it is about **mobilizing the existing workforce to adapt and evolve.***

This is where HR leaders play a strategic role.

IV. The Transition Is Ultimately About People

Sustainability transformations often focus on technology, energy sources, or operational changes. Yet the most difficult part of the transition is frequently **human behavior and organizational mindset**.

Moving toward greener operations requires shifts in 1) **Skills** – employees must learn new tools, technologies, and approaches 2) **Mindsets** – sustainability must move from compliance to long-term value creation 3) **Ways of working** – teams must rethink “business as usual” processes

Without these shifts, sustainability risks becoming a **reporting exercise rather than a true transformation**.

A successful transition requires organizations to intentionally guide their workforce through this evolution.

V. The Opportunity for Forward-Looking Organizations

The transition toward greener economies is inevitable. What remains uncertain is **which organizations will lead the change and which will struggle to adapt**.

Forward-looking companies recognize that sustainability is not only about environmental responsibility—it is also about **future competitiveness, workforce readiness, and long-term resilience**.

And at the center of this transition is a critical realization:

Sustainability transformation is ultimately a people transformation.

Organizations that invest early in developing green capabilities, cultivating the right mindsets, and empowering HR to lead workforce transitions will be far better positioned to thrive in the evolving economic landscape.

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Claire joined NRI Manila in 2025 as a Business Development Consultant for Human Capital Strategies. She brings over nine years of experience spanning the public and private sectors, with a track record in business development, project management, and human capital initiatives. She previously served as Program Operations Head, where her projects earned national recognition in Corporate Social Responsibility and Business Communication, as well as the WHO Western Pacific Innovation Award for mental health initiatives.

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