

New foundation promotes soft skills for workers in India

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Credit: University of Michigan

Training workers with soft skills like time and stress management, problem solving, communication and teamwork can have big impacts on the productivity of workers and company profits, says a University of Michigan researcher.

Achyuta Adhvaryu, assistant professor of [business economics](#) and public policy at Michigan's Ross School of Business, has studied the impact of [soft skills](#) in the garment industry in India over the past five years, and has now launched a foundation to take the message to other sectors in India.

Along with Anant Nyshadham of Boston College, Adhvaryu started the Good Business Lab last year. Anant Ahuja from Shahi Exports, India's largest garment manufacturing factory, is also a co-founder and CEO of the Lab.

"Our goal with starting a foundation is to study interventions that have the potential to impact [worker](#) welfare while also promoting the growth of firms," Adhvaryu said. "We incubate new ideas and serve as a platform to disseminate findings from our research."

The textiles and apparel sector employs more than 119 million workers in India, with [women](#) making up roughly 35 percent of the workforce. The garment sector is also the largest employer of low-skilled and semi-skilled female workers.

"Gender imbalance persists in many spheres of life, whether it is caring for children, participating in village politics or surfing the internet," Adhvaryu said. "Our research is evaluating whether and how women

work, their lives and the lives of their families and communities improve."

The Good Business Lab is planning to establish 10 garment-sector skill enhancement centers for women at rural locations, informing job creation policy at the national level. It has received funding from the U.K. Department for International Development, the Indian government and Shahi Exports for the evaluation and implementation of the project.

The women who complete the training will be offered a job at one of the Shahi's garment factories and the lab will track the women over a period of time to see its impact.

The migration of women from rural to urban areas is also a key focus of research for the Good Business Lab. A research survey is being rolled out to 20 taluks, or subdivisions of districts, in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.

Worker retention, especially for migrants is a major industry-wide challenge, Adhvaryu said.

India's massive labor force is second only to China's. However, 90 percent of Indian workers are not formally trained, compared to 47 percent of Chinese workers. Three out of four women in India don't work. By giving women training and skills, the Good Business Lab hopes to influence the conversation at the policy level.

"We hope the study will provide insights that can have sector- and economy-wide implications," Adhvaryu said.

Provided by University of Michigan

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