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Pillars of Creating Sustainable Personnel in an Organization

Abstract: Sustainable personnel, and that means the one that knows, understands and, above all, applies the principles of sustainable development in their work, is to be sensitive to economic, ecological and social problems appearing in the global economy. In order to meet these needs, it seems to be indispensable to search for the ways to provide organizations with human resources (employees) that meet the sustainability criteria. The objective of this article is to present the development of the sustainability concept and to indicate a role of the sustainable human resources management in creating sustainable enterprises. The study has explained the essence of the sustainable human resources management, which shapes the area of the knowledge. This area could significantly accelerate the transformation of the consumer societies (employees) into the socially (employees) sustainable. In this context, the important element has become the search for an answer to the question on how to create personnel in the organization, corresponding to the requirements by sustainable development. The article has based on the systematic text review method of text sources and their synthesis [Czakon 2013]. This allowed to indicate the relevance of the topic and the need to take it.

Key words: sustainable development, sustainable management, sustainable human resources management, sustainable personnel

Introduction

The ongoing globalization of the economy, demographic growth and the high level of economic activity, are some of the principal reasons of ecological problems, which occur more and more frequently in the world. In order to satisfy the ever-growing needs, a man transforms the natural environment, uses more and more of natural food, water

and energy, while simultaneously contributing to the release of harmful gases and chemicals, which, in the light of the ever-increasing population of the world, and, therefore, of consumption, is a feature of a development which is not permanent. Taking under consideration the organizational context, the influence exerted by enterprises upon the natural environment results from the selection of raw materials, suppliers, land use, production processes (the production of waste and pollution), selected organizational structures, management systems, employment and information use. For that very reason, the creation of sustainable development has to entail, first and foremost, changes in enterprises, including changes in human resource management. It is human resources management in the organization which affects individuals and groups, as well as all organizational entities in order to showcase balanced attitudes and behaviours [Jackson et al. 2011]. In order to face these problems, it is important to firstly make the societies (employees) aware of the threats which result from such resource management, and secondly, to implement measures to prevent wastage; to put it in a nutshell, the creation of sustainable enterprises through the implementation of sustainable management based upon sustainable personnel activities. On the other hand, taking under consideration the changes taking place in traditional thinking about human resources management, as well as in connection with the necessity of strategic human resources management expansion, sustainable human resources management may constitute an alternative to organizational success.

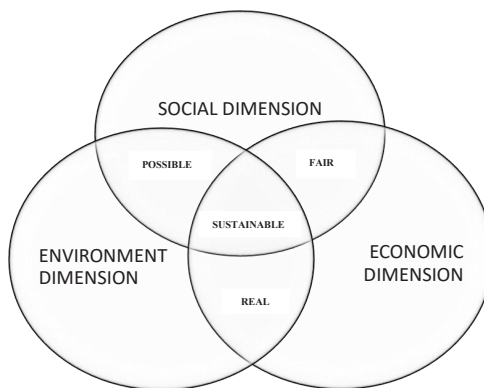
Foundations of sustainable development

Environmental problems were the foundations for defining the conception of sustainable development by the UN World Environment and Development Commission in 1987. In accordance with the findings of this body, sustainable development is “a process the objective of which is to satisfy the developmental aspirations of the present generation, in a manner enabling the same aspirations to be pursued by the future generations” [World Commission on Environment and Development 1987, p. 37]. Taking under consideration long-term ecological strategies, the objective was to introduce such a philosophy of sustainable development which would integrate economic and ecological objectives with social objectives in the context of fair opportunities for sharing resources for the present and future generations.

Therefore, propagated sustainable development operates under a three-dimensional aegis (fig. 1). The first of them is the social dimension, where sustainable development contributes to the improvement of living conditions (health) and the development of individual achievements and personal fulfilment, reduction of social inequalities, as

well as to the use of cultural and historical specific character of various social groups. In the case of the second dimension, namely the environmental one, sustainable development determines the preservation of natural resources, the quality of the environment, and of biodiversity. In accordance with the last, economic, dimension, the task of sustainable development is to ensure long-term economic growth based upon technology, real estate or funds, etc. [Vidrascu 2015]. The introduction of sustainable development has to be based upon ethical foundations consistent with the principles of intergenerational equality, justice, risk minimization, harmony with the environment, and, simultaneously, it has to be possible and real [Kośmicki 2010].

Figure 1. Dimensions of sustainable development



Source: based on [Vidrascu 2015].

Since the UN Commission's findings, the conception of sustainable development has been discussed in the course of the First Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, followed by those in Kyoto (in 1997) and in The Hague (in 2000). The topic is also current today, principally in connection with the European Union strategy "Europe 2020. A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth" (fig. 2)¹. In addition to the environmental protection priorities mentioned in the document, the principal objective of the activity is the social factor, also referred to as human resources, including increasing the employment rate of people at the age between 20 and 64, reducing the number of early

¹ The Strategy constitutes a long-term programme of social and economic development of the European Union, the implementation of which is anticipated to take place between 2010 and 2020, which was approved of by the Council of Europe on 17th June, 2010.

school-leavers, increasing the proportion of people at the age between 30 and 34 with tertiary education and limiting the number of people living in Europe below the poverty line [European Commission Communication 2010].

Figure 2. Priorities of the strategy „Europe 2020”



Source: own work.

It follows from the above that the implementation of actions towards the sustainable development of personnel is required both by the governments (taking under consideration the human resource understood as the citizens of the country) and enterprises (and that means their employees).

As noted in her report, I. Ehnert [2016], in response to the growing public awareness about the importance of organizational contribution to sustainable development, corporations have an increased incentive to report their sustainability efforts. The main influence on the reporting of such practices is the origin of the country, the headquarters of the organization.

From sustainable development to sustainable human resource management

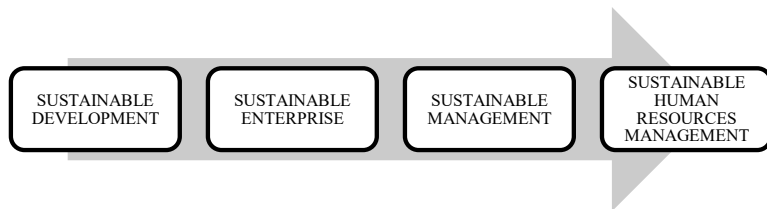
The introduction of the conception of sustainable development and meeting the expectations it faces at the global level requires the application of the principles of sustainable development at the national, regional, local and business level.

Organizations which can be referred to as sustainable enterprises are these which respect the principles of sustainable development in their activities, with the proviso that the implementation of the adopted objectives of sustainable development is possible, principally, thanks to the employees of the organization. This is the level where most of the issues connected with the use of resources, ecological and social activities are resolved. As you know, enterprises acting upon the basis of management functions (planning, organizing, motivating, controlling and developing) define the objectives of their operations. Moreover, in connection with sustainable development, these functions are the essential elements of the organization, hence we are talking about the need of the implementation of sustainable management [Pabian 2011]. From this point of view, the appropriate management strategy ought to include all three dimensions: social, economic and environmental, while taking under consideration that the processes connected with the introduction and the maintenance of balance are interrelated, and, therefore, the balance of one of them does not guarantee balance in other areas. In accordance with the opinion of W. Przychodzeń, in a sustainable enterprise, the activity in the social area is based upon the conception of Corporate Social Responsibility, in the environmental area it involves minimizing ecological burdens, and from the economic perspective it ought to lead to stabilization in the area of financial and operational policy [Przychodzeń 2013]. When transferring the objectives of sustainable development to the organizational area, attention ought to be paid to the need of treating all three of its dimensions equally when making decisions affecting its success. At the corporate level, the conception of sustainable development can be considered in the following aspects [Grudzewski, Hejduk 2011]:

1. as the ability to act in a hyperdynamic environment,
2. as the ability to renew and use the environmental conditions,
3. as the capability of constant learning, development, renewal and transformation, in order to maintain the position on the market while balancing the needs of stakeholders.

We ought to bear in mind that in order to achieve sustainable development at the corporate level, all existing systems in the organization ought to be concentrated on sustainable development. This allows an attempt to discuss the relationship between sustainable development and various systems which exist in an enterprise, including the human resource management system. Considering the historical evolution of human resources connected with the changes constantly occurring in the environment, a new paradigm, that of sustainable development, was bound to appear in this area as well (fig. 3).

Figure 3. From sustainable development to sustainable human resources management



Source: own work.

The dialogue on sustainable development in human resources management was commenced with the discussion on “sustainable work systems” (SWS), which dealt with the issue of sustainable development at the level of individual workplaces [Docherty et al. 2002]. In accordance with the opinion of M.R. Vickers [2005], human resources management is an organizational function which presents the greatest potential in the inclusion of thinking based upon sustainable development at the organizational level. He arrives at the conclusion, that in this way, the continuity of human resources management evolution can be proposed (fig. 4). ‘Sustainable development’, treated as a new step in the evolution of human resource management, possesses this continuity. The mere adaptation of strategic human resources management to the economic results of the organization is no longer enough, and the need for sustainable human resources management results from the need of supporting more sustainable enterprises, their good results in economic, social and environmental activities [Cesar et al. 2011]. According to I. Ehnert and W. Harry [2012, p. 236], human resources management has could play an important role in the implementing the “way of thinking about sustainable development” in the business organizations.

In order to understand the idea and directions of sustainable human resources management better, a review of the scientific literature in the aspect of the definition of the issue has been made. Selected definitions are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Definitions of sustainable human resources management

AUTHOR	YEAR	DEFINITION
Zaugg <i>et al.</i>	2001	long-term recruitment, socially and economically effective, as well as the development of employees
Thom & Zaugg	2004	long-term, action-based activities the objective of which is the conscientious and profitable recruitment and selection, development and operation, allocation, but also dismissal of employees
Ulrich&Brockbank,	2005	activities the objective of which is to create value for stakeholders

AUTHOR	YEAR	DEFINITION
Ehnert	2009	a model of planned or emerging human resources strategies and practices which are to enable organizational objectives to be achieved, while recreating the human resources base for a long period of time controlling the induced feedback effects of human resources systems based upon human resources
Weissenrieder & Kosel	2011	orientation of human and personnel work on the company's goals in the long-term perspective, and at the same time not on the optimization of costs, but building in the long-term the human potential of a successful enterprise
Kramar	2014	a model of planned or emerging human resources strategies and practices the objective of which is to make it possible to achieve financial, social and environmental objectives. The objective of that is to minimize the negative influence exerted upon the natural environment, and upon people and communities; recognizes the key executive role of general managers, middle and senior human resources management managers as well as specialists and employees in providing consistent information.
Pocztowski	2016	the need of searching for and implement sustainable innovative solutions, taking under consideration the social, ecological and efficiency dimensions with an emphasis on the subjective treatment of employees, Corporate Social Responsibility activities, strengthening confidence in work processes and developing effective work systems
Kennedy	2017	management and leadership philosophy concerning the possibilities of contributing to the organization's success by minimizing the negative influence of its activities exerted by them upon environmental and social factors while improving financial factors.

Source: own work upon the basis of: [Ehnert 2009; Kramar 2014; Zaugg et al. 2001; Thom, Zaugg 2004; Ulrich, Brockbank 2005; Pocztowski 2016; Kennedy, Lakshmi 2017; Weissenrieder, Kosel 2010].

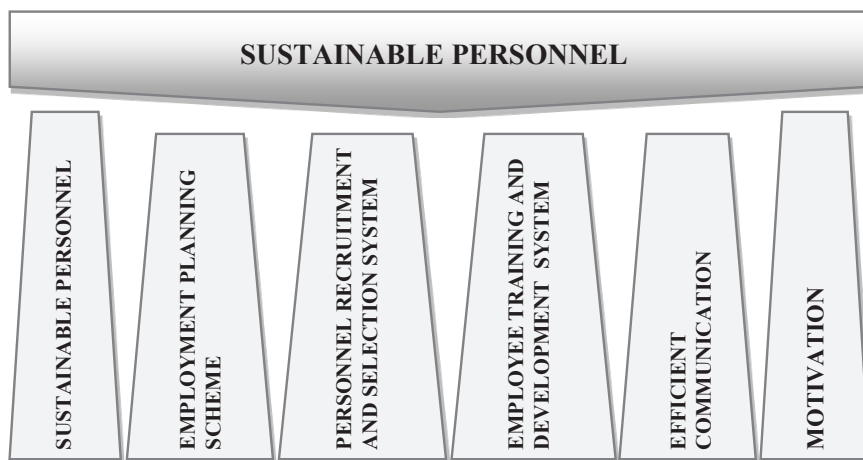
Following the fact that human resources management is both a means and a goal to achieve strategic organizational objectives, S. Taylor, J. Osland and C.P. Egri [2012] present two types of arguments why sustainability is important for human resources management. First of all, human resource management helps to manage employee attitudes and actions to achieve sustainable development objectives (human resource management is treated as means to achieve objectives). Secondly, the principles of sustainable development can be included in human resource management systems, which constitute the long-term physical, social and economic well-being of employees [Stankeviciute, Savaneviciene 2013].

Pillars of sustainable development of personnel

In order to achieve the sustainable development model in all its important components: economic, socio-cultural and environmental, it is required to have adequate human capital and to define its development trends in the medium and long term [Ciobotaru, Angeluta 2014]. The very cycle of developing sustainable personnel in a company, and that

means developing personnel that understand processes and principles connected with sustainable development, is not simple and requires both time and financial outlay. Its creation has to be based upon the following pillars: sustainable employees, the personnel recruitment and selection system, the employee training and development system [Pabian 2011], the employment planning scheme, employee motivation programmes, effective communication (fig. 4).

Figure 4. Pillars of sustainable human resources in an organization



Source: own work.

On similar assumptions, it was based already in the 2001 report by R.J. Zaugg. He has claimed that sustainable human resource management can only be implemented if it is based on the individual responsibility of employees and it is also directed to the future. It has been defined by methodological and instrumental approaches aimed at long-term, socially responsible and economically effective recruitments, trainings, retentions and employment of employees.

If the intention of an organization is to balance human resources partially or completely and to prepare a strategic plan in this regard, the following issues ought to be considered: [Pabian 2017, p. 344]:

1. what features ought sustainable personnel to possess?
2. what areas of activity ought to characterize sustainable personnel in an enterprise?
3. how to acquire personnel with the required characteristics and areas of activity?
4. how to transform employees in a company into sustainable personnel?

The condition of implementation of a management system based upon the sustainable principles in an organization, is them being accepted by all employees that will be the executors of the newly adopted strategy. The implementation of the principles of sustainable development obliges both employees and the organization itself to become involved in this process. For the former, it is associated with an increase in cognitive activity and a change in behavioural patterns, and for the latter it is connected with incurring additional costs, for instance, in the area of training and bearing the risk of failures. This, of course, requires effective communication allowing both the transfer of new ideas and the elimination of the emerging doubts [Kowalczyk 2011]. Other elements conditioning the creation of sustainable personnel in the organization are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Characteristics of pillars of the creation of sustainable personnel in an organization

PILLAR	JUSTIFICATION	CHARACTERISTICS OF ACTIVITIES
EMPLOYMENT PLANS	In terms of implementing sustainable human resources in an organization, it is indispensable to prepare employee acquisition and training plans, as well as motivational actions. It is also indispensable to optimize plans taking under consideration, for instance, time required for the recruitment, allocation or retraining of personnel.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) development of a vision for the sustainable development of personnel, 2) preparation of strategic programs in the field of the creation of sustainable personnel, 3) choosing one of the strategies ensuring the right number and type of employees with sustainable orientation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • full transformation, • gradual transformation, 4) securing funds for the development of resources towards sustainable management, 5) the creation of information flow systems, 6) analysis and description of workplaces in terms of compliance with the principles of sustainable development, 7) preparation of appropriate competence profiles
EMPLOYEE RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION	In connection with the progressing changes in the conception of sustainable human resources management, it becomes indispensable in the organizations to shape new competencies and to manage talents and knowledge among employees. This entails indispensable changes in the training and improvement systems towards a team learning process focused on shaping attitudes and involvement in the organization.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) preparation of an appropriate set of questions to conduct interviews verifying the candidates' attitudes, 2) selecting candidates with pro-ecological and pro-social attitude, 3) accepting employees with high development potential, 4) employing pre-prepared workers (with some experience) to implement sustainable strategies

PILLAR	JUSTIFICATION	CHARACTERISTICS OF ACTIVITIES
EMPLOYEE TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT	Training forms the basis for the implementation of strategies adopted by the company, including the implementation of sustainable development. They are an alternative way to acquire sustainable personnel, especially in a situation when the rapid exchange of personnel is not possible due to practical and financial reasons.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) determining training needs, 2) directing employees to post-graduate studies and trainings outside the workplace and at the workplace, 3) assigning trainers or moderators to the employees, who are oriented at sustainable development
MOTIVATION	Effective motivation can lead to the widespread and long-term involvement of employees in social and ecological activities.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) managers and directors provide the instances of appropriate behaviours, 2) the introduction of a motivational system for employees to disseminate social and environmental initiatives, 3) the preparation of instruments affecting the sustainable behaviour of employees, especially in the following relations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4) • employee – enterprise, 5) • employee – supervisor, 6) • employee – work station
SUSTAINABLE PERSONNEL	The main benefits of functioning in the organization of sustainable personnel are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • decrease in the company's operating costs, • the reduction of harmful human impact on the environment, • the elimination of the wastage of production factors, • increasing the employee awareness of ecological activities, • increasing work efficiency. 	Sustainable personnel is featured by: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) knowledge about the state of socio-ecological threats and ways to counteract them, 2) sensitivity and reaction to problems in this area, 3) innovation in methods of rational resource management, 4) openness to new technologies and the suggestions of rational production and consumption, 5) activity and reaction to existing environmental and social problems, 6) initiating changes in the equipment and the workplace environment, or the way the work is done.

Source: own work upon the basis of: Oczkowska 2014; Pabian 2011; 2016; [Hilarowicz 2015].

The activities enumerated in Table 2, undertaken at the functional level of the activity of an enterprise, may significantly contribute to developing personnel following the principles of sustainable development. It is significant to take under consideration sustainable issues at each and every stage: both that of planning, and the recruitment or training personnel. Providing an appropriate information and motivational system constitute affective human resources management tools, and they matter a lot in terms of the discussed conception as well. It is worth pointing out that omitting one of the above-mentioned elements may result in a failure while implementing the conception of sustainable.

Conclusion

The conducted analysis of the literature makes it clear that there is on-going evolution of the conception of sustainable development in all the aspects of it, including, as well, that of personnel. Sustainable development is an organizational issue that requires translation into specific short- and long-term activities within not only the state, but institutional and social. These activities have to be permanent changes in the many areas, that the constant need to revitalize the subject. In order to make the implemented changes effective, the good will and involvement of both personnel and an organization are indispensable. It also ought to be remembered that a particular responsibility for implementing the ideas and the principles of sustainable development is that of managers and executives. In order to determine the direction of their activities, it seems, therefore, to be indispensable to define the basis (pillars) first of building sustainable personnel, taking under consideration the benefits and threats, and also the profile of these activities. It is indispensable as well to strive to understand the conception of sustainable development itself better, and also to raise the awareness and responsibility for the environment and the further development of civilization.

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