

Sustainable management of human resources in enterprises as an example of sustainable development

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Abstract

The aim of the article is to present the essence of sustainable human resource management and attempt to answer the question of whether enterprises actually use the concept of the sustainable management of human resources in business management to achieve sustainable development. This is why the following research question was chosen for the study: “Is the concept of sustainable human resource management important in achieving sustainable development of an enterprise?” Verification of the research question and the realisation of the stated goal were made on the basis of a critical analysis of the source literature and a case study. In striving to achieve the research goal, the first part of the article presents the essence of sustainable human resource management; the second part presents a case study. This paper concludes with the applications in which the research question was confirmed. Enterprises choose a strategy for human resource management, depending on the following: the situation in the labour market, the economic situation, legal regulations, demographics, changes in technology in a given enterprise, the activities of both the employers’ and employees’ organisations, as well as self-governing bodies, employment agencies or personnel consulting firms and the capital owned by the organisation. The results of this study have shown that enterprises actually use the concept of the sustainable management of human resources in business management to achieve sustainable development.

Introduction

One of the new concepts in the area of human resource management, which provides a different perspective on the methods of human resource management in an enterprise, is the concept of sustainable human resource management. This is a consequence of the interest of theoreticians and practitioners in the issues of sustainable development, which requires changes in the sphere of human resource management to be made and which should ultimately take the form of sustainable management that combines an economic, ecological and social perspective, which should also take place in the area of human resource management.

The aim of this article is therefore to present the essence of sustainable human resource management

and attempt to answer the question of whether enterprises actually use sustainable management of human resources in business management to achieve sustainable development.

This is why the following research question was put forward in the study: “Is the concept of sustainable human resource management important for achieving sustainable development of an enterprise?” The verification of the research question and the realisation of the stated goal have been made on the basis of a critical analysis of the source literature and a case study.

Striving to achieve the research goal, the first part of this article presents the essence of sustainable human resource management; the second part presents the case study. This publication concludes with applications for sustainable human resource management.

As the issue which has been undertaken is extensive and multithreaded, this article focuses on the presentation of the most important problems in sustainable human resource management.

Literature review

The aim of economies, countries, and enterprises in the contemporary world is to strive for unending economic growth despite there being only limited resources, which becomes a source of large economic, ecological and social problems; sustainable development is the way to overcome these problems. The implementation of this idea has encountered numerous barriers, economic and political, as well as cultural and social, which has resulted in deepening inequality. This leads to an uncontrolled increase in both economic and social problems as well as breaching the limits of environmental tolerance. The search for new opportunities for pro-ecological and prosocial activities in enterprises can only be dealt with by the emerging area of knowledge, known as sustainable management. An integral part of this is the sustainable management of human resources (Pabian, 2017, pp. 7–8).

The development of the mainstream theory of human resource management (HRM) has long been concerned with the question of how human resource management can improve the performance of a business (Truss et al., 2013). Since the beginning of the 21st century, new concepts have emerged in the field of human resource management, which approach human resource management from a different perspective. The consequence of the interest of theoreticians and practitioners in the issue of sustainable development is sustainable management of human resources, the goal of which is to contribute to both achieving the economic goals of the enterprise and balancing the needs of both the present and future generations, and thus prevent serious social and ecological problems in the future. This is an approach that aims to link human resource management with sustainable development. This term is burdened with semantic difficulties, in the same way as the conceptualisation of its relationship with HRM. Therefore, sustainable human resource management is currently perceived in many ways. Moreover, the negative and positive effects of HRM on the various interested parties are clearly determined and particular attention has also been paid to the processes that are related to the implementation of HRM policy, and the difficulties in reconciling the competitive organisational requirements have also been recognised.

Such an approach takes a clear moral position into account regarding the desired results of the organisation. Balanced HRM can therefore be understood in terms of many complementary frameworks (Kramar, 2014). As Wyrzykowska and Zaleśna (Wyrzykowska & Zaleśna, 2017) rightly point out, it is qualified employees in particular who understand and apply the principles of sustainable development in their work who play an important role in the process of transforming enterprises into sustainable organisations.

There have been an increasing number of publications in this field throughout the world, such as: R. Zaugg, A. Blum and N. Thom (Zaugg, Blum & Thom, 2001), I. Ehnert (Ehnert, 2009), M. Jones (Jones, 2010), S. Cohen (Cohen, 2011), G. Muller-Christ (Muller-Christ, 2011), B. Bossink (Bossink, 2012), G. Haugen (Haugen, 2014), M. Epstein and A. Buhovac (Epstein & Buhovac, 2014). In Poland, these issues are dealt with, among others, by: Pabian (Pabian, 2011, pp. 13–14), Zaleśna and Wyrzykowska (Wyrzykowska & Zaleśna, 2017), Bombiak and Marciniuk-Kluska (Bombiak & Marciniuk-Kluska, 2019) or Mazur (Mazur, 2015, p. 8), amongst others. When analysing the publications of the above-mentioned economists, it should be emphasised that HRM plays a significant role in the way enterprises are understood, and how organisations understand social responsibility has an influence on the treatment of the employees that are employed there.

One of the first definitions of sustainable human resource management was presented by R. Zaugg, A. Blum and N. Thom (Zaugg, Blum & Thom, 2001). According to this paper, balanced HRM includes: work-life balance, ability and willingness to remain attractive in the labour market, increasing the scope of employees' autonomy and the use of their competences. Whereas, according to I. Ehnert (Ehnert, 2009), sustainable management of human resources means undertaking such practices that enable the organisation's goals to be achieved in the long-term and at the same time are an expression of care for the employees. In turn, R. Kramar (Kramar, 2014) extended this definition to minimising the negative impact of an enterprise's activities on the natural environment and on both the employees and community. She emphasises the role of all the employees of the organisation in this process. Further considerations were raised by E. Cohen, S. Taylor and M. Muller-Camen (Cohen, Taylor & Muller-Camen, 2012), who claim that sustainable human resource management supports the strategy of sustainable development of an organisation, emphasises the

fair treatment, development and well-being of the employees, contributes to building the skills, values and trust of employees and increases their enthusiasm for the idea of sustainable development; they bear in mind the health of both internal (employees) and external stakeholders (all of the entities that are interested in the functioning of the organisation), and support environmentally friendly organisational practices.

The environmental aspect also appears in the concept of green human resources management (green HRM). Mampra (Mampra, 2013) defined Green HRM as the use of HRM policy to encourage sustainable use of resources in enterprises and the promotion of the causes of ecology, which additionally increases the morale and satisfaction of the employees. Zoogah (Zoogah, 2011) described Green HRM as the principles of HRM, a philosophy and practices that promote the sustainable use of business resources and prevent any harmful effects resulting from environmental problems in organisations. The existing literature in the field of HR on sustainable development suggests that an increasing number of HR managers are willing to adapt their organisation to be oriented towards environmental protection. The empirical research that has been carried out (Iraldo, Testa & Frey, 2009) highlights the impact of environmental management practices on an organisation's performance through the use of various parameters. Here, the organisation's department of human resources plays a significant role in creating a culture of sustainable development for the enterprise (Harmon, Fairfield & Wirtenberg, 2010).

A different focus was presented by J. Pfeffer (Pfeffer, 2010, p. 36), who uses the term "human sustainability". He considered the impact of HR management practices on the health and life expectancy of the employees.

In summary, the assumptions of the concept of sustainable development and thinking in the context of business-society-ecology forces a change of approach to the implementation of the function of personnel in organisations (Hilarowicz, 2015), especially where it was reduced to only the area of human resources administration. To implement and realise the concept of sustainability - the function of personnel must take the role of a catalyst for change. In this sense, the main emphasis should also be placed on the strategic dimension of actions in the area of human resources, related to the decision-making process, leadership, communication, shaping the organisational culture and the commonly understood development of human resources. Hence, there are many

challenges that face the procedures and practice of human resource management (Thom & Zaugg, 2004). Human resource management, based on the idea of sustainability, is defined as a long-term, conceptual approach as well as actions that combine the economic and social aspect of business responsibility and the corresponding practices in the area of recruitment and selection, allocation, development and dismissal of employees. Increasingly, the importance of the global dimension of human resource management, the related need to shape new competences in employees and managing the continuity of knowledge and talent is being pointed out. Investing in employees' skills through the development of key competences and promoting the idea of lifelong learning, gives rise to changes in the traditional character of training and improvement functions, as well as treating development as a social change and switching to a mutual, collaborative learning process (Hilarowicz, 2015a). Connections can be observed here with shaping attitudes and creating the right climate for involvement in the organisation.

In addition, more than ever, the importance of corporate social responsibility is being emphasised, that is, practices related to what Bowen (Bowen, 1953) originally defined as the obligation to orientate oneself in the expectations, goals and values of society. In accordance with the guidelines of ISO 26000 (PKN, 2012), corporate social responsibility represents the organisation's responsibility for the impact of its decisions and actions on society and the environment by maintaining transparent and ethical behaviour that is concordant with the applicable laws and is consistent with international standards of conduct, taking into account the expectations of stakeholders. Actual actions in the area of social responsibility may have an impact on the reputation of the organisation, as well as the loyalty (employees, consumers, customers, users), motivation and commitment of employees and may result in an increase in work efficiency and, as a result, job satisfaction and quality of life.

It must be admitted that the combination of sustainable development, human resource management and the environment are new areas of rapid development, and therefore not fully characterised in the literature (Jackson et al., 2011). Ulrich, Brockbank and Johnson (Ulrich, Brockbank & Johnson, 2009) indicated that many HR systems must be tailored to each other in order to increase the likelihood that the organisation will achieve its goals. Cherian and Jacob (Cherian & Jacob, 2012) said in their study that recruitment, training, as well as the employees'

motivation and awards are important human dimensions that contribute to improving the implementation of sustainable management principles by employees. Therefore, the following statement proposed by Pabian (Pabian, 2011) should be considered a complete definition: “sustainable personnel are employees who are not only oriented towards their economic goals (their own and the enterprises), but who are also ecologically and socially active. Ecological and social activity is manifested in three areas of their activity: implementation of the enterprise’s goals, performance of work and behaviour.

Methodology

The main goal of this study was to assess whether enterprises actually use sustainable human resource management in the management of the enterprise to achieve sustainable development as well as to present the essence of sustainable human resource management in the light of the available literature. This study was based on both secondary and primary data; the stages of the research process included:

1. The assessment of the current state of knowledge about sustainable human resources management, with particular emphasis on the concept of HRM, green human resources management, CSR and sustainable enterprise development. To this end, the source literature and data from available sources, databases and websites were collected. A review of both the Polish and foreign literature has been carried out. The implementation of this stage made it possible to present the essence of sustainable human resources management in the light of the available literature.
2. Conducting pilot studies, in the form of interviews in 17 small, medium and large enterprises in the West Pomeranian Province, carried out from April to July 2019. The results of the research are presented in the case study. The implementation of this stage was used to prove that enterprises want to achieve sustainable development and that the majority of the surveyed enterprises actually use sustainable human resource management in business management. The study also enabled the barriers to sustainable human resource management in the surveyed organisations to be identified and it has confirmed that the concept of sustainable human resource management is very important for achieving sustainable enterprise development. The hypothesis was also confirmed, because the entities that can stimulate the creation of sustainable enterprises are human resources that are in

a given organisation, and when properly managed, affect the building of a competitive advantage for the organisation, including those related to sustainable development.

17 interviews were conducted with managers in four small, 10 medium and three large enterprises in the West Pomeranian Province. The enterprises were chosen based on the assumption that these organisations have declared on their websites that employees are the most valuable resource for the company. The managers were asked to answer the following questions:

Question 1: Has your company introduced / does it want to introduce sustainable enterprise management?

Question 2: Does your company use sustainable human resource management in enterprise management to achieve sustainable development, and what are the most important challenges it faces?

Question 3: What motivators made your company undertake activities that are related to the sustainable management of human resources?

Question 4: What barriers related to the introduction of sustainable human resource management have you encountered?

Question 5: Does your company clearly emphasise social, environmental, management and employee aspects that are related to sustainable development in its operation?

Question 6: What is the role of human resources leaders and the HR department in your company in the activities for sustainable development?

The results of these questions are presented in the further part of the article. The aim of this study was achieved and the hypothesis has been verified on the basis of the results of the empirical study.

Sustainable human resources management in enterprises – case study

Sustainable HRM in the surveyed enterprises

An eminent economist, Peter Drucker (Drucker, 1954), added one more thing to the four classic management functions - planning, organising, motivating, controlling: human development. This function is likely to become more and more important as investments in human capital become the primary activity of many enterprises. The basic condition for effective human resource management is an effective system of education, acquiring qualifications and further education for the people who are employed in the system of an economic initiative.

Increasing the level of education includes employees of both companies and employers. This issue concerns preparations in the field of business management, especially in the area of human resource management (Czerna-Grygiel, 2011, p. 372).

In a sustainable organisation, the characteristic of an individual employee is also important – human sustainability (Wyrzykowska & Zaleśna, 2017, p. 375). J. Pfeffer (Pfeffer, 2010, p. 36) asked how management practices in an enterprise affect the physical and mental well-being of a human being. Thus, he has added another dimension to the concept of a sustainable organisation – an individual dimension related to the employee. In addition, G. Spreitzer, C. Porath and C. Gibson (Spreitzer, Porath & Gibson, 2012, p. 158–161) referred to the dimension of human sustainability. In their opinion, organisations produce constant achievements (sustainable performance) thanks to their appropriate approach to their employees; therefore the task of managers is to create such an appropriate organisational culture.

Interviews were then conducted, considering the information above, and in order to investigate the essence of sustainable human resource management in the surveyed enterprises. This resulted in the data that in the 17 surveyed companies, the implementation of sustainable management of the enterprise, including sustainable management of human resources is only taken into account in four of them (two small and two medium-sized organisations), and in the other 13 companies the interviewees declared that sustainable business management and sustainable human resource management only function in their enterprises to achieve sustainable development.

Significant motivators of the companies for introducing or willingness to introduce sustainable human resource management were most often the willingness to increase participation in social life (12 enterprises), savings in financial and operational costs (17 enterprises) and growing awareness among the business community with regard to ecological significance and adopting various management techniques related to environmental protection (16 enterprises). The other motivators that were mentioned are presented in Table 1.

Enterprises are more and more often taking into account the differences in the needs of individual people and groups of employees, as well as in their style of work and aspirations. All of the managers declared that their enterprises provide equal opportunities for each employee and adopt ethical

Table 1. The most important motivators for sustainable human resource management in the surveyed enterprises

s/n	Motivators for sustainable human resource management
1.	Willingness to increase participation in social life
2.	Care for the environment, promoting social and environmental health
3.	Saving financial resources and operating costs
4.	Care for the health and safety of employees
5.	Better company reputation
6.	It is fashionable
7.	The competitive advantage of the organisation
8.	Better organisational structure
9.	Better qualified senior, middle and lower level staff
10.	The willingness of employees to apply the principle of sustainable development in their work
11.	Perception of corporate social responsibility (CSR) as the main factor that drives the company's financial results
12.	Increasing awareness among the business community regarding ecological importance and adopting various management techniques related to environmental protection
13.	Distinguishing features of the policy in the fields of: recruitment, performance and evaluation management, training and staff development, employee relations and remuneration systems, and motivating employees to implement the principles of sustainable personnel management
14.	Less absenteeism and turnover among employees
15.	Acquiring talent and attracting high quality employees
16.	A large offering of HR that includes leadership development workshops to help managers develop "front wheel" skills, people's skills or behavioural skills, team work, diversity, change management, and collaboration

principles: employee management – based on concern for people, justice and transparency. They also emphasised that social, environmental, management and employee aspects are very important to their enterprises. Among the areas in which HR departments contribute or could contribute to supporting employees in sustainable human resource management and in the sustainable development of a company, are: training and development, cooperation and team work, business ethics, employee engagement, leadership development and talent management, change management, diversity and multiculturalism, creation and inculcation of values, health protection and employee safety. In 10 of the cases, it was added that these areas should be accurately captured at every stage of management: starting from planning, organising, motivating and ending with control. Two managers stated that the maintenance and improvement of the physical and mental condition of employees is part of the purpose of their enterprises, which are oriented towards human resources. The managers thought that the HR department was able to exert a primary influence on the position

of the company in the market (17), and play a very active role in managing the initiatives related to sustainable development. HR leaders in 9 of the companies were perceived as being strong in terms of significant impact, as well as participating in board meetings in which major initiatives were discussed and supervised. Only in three of the organisations, were HR leaders perceived as having the highest rank. It should be added that HR leaders were only perceived as actively initiating initiatives related to sustainable development of human resources in two enterprises.

11 of the managers recognised that the proper process of recruitment and selection of the employees is significant in sustainable human resource management, allowing for employees of high internal motivation to be recruited and being oriented towards development. Therefore, it was most often added that the development processes that are conducive to employees achieving their goals should be supported by other elements of the personnel process, where the processes of assessing and motivating personnel play a very important role. It is important to eliminate socially irresponsible activities (12 managers agreed with this), among which they listed nepotism in first place and then following this: subjective selection criteria, non-inclusion of substantive criteria in the HR process, lack of clear and well-known criteria for motivating and evaluating employees, lack of fair and well-known criteria for dismissal.

In summary, modern enterprises (and the ones that were surveyed) should develop in accordance with the concept of sustainable development that has been adopted at both the level of the European Union and the Polish economy, not only taking care of their economic goals, but also of society, the natural environment and their employees. Therefore, they must implement a strategy of sustainable development and sustainable human resource management, the implementation of which requires knowledge and the application of these concepts by the employees of the enterprise, as there is clear evidence that a significant number of employees feel strongly connected with both society and the environment, which is associated with a greater commitment and satisfaction with their work and their company.

Barriers to sustainable human resource management in the surveyed enterprises

In the enterprises that were surveyed, the owners, managerial staff and employees encountered numerous barriers related to the implementation of

sustainable human resource management. The barriers to and the motivators for the introduction of sustainable human resource management are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The most important barriers to sustainable human resource management in the surveyed enterprises

s/n	Barriers to sustainable human resource management
1.	The costs of introducing the concept of sustainable business management and sustainable human resource management
2.	Difficulties in measuring the return on investment
3.	Lack of support from managerial staff (leaders of the organisation)
4.	Costs related to the continuation of activities in this area
5.	Lack of organisational skills and knowledge
6.	Evaluation of the implementation of sustainable human resource management in organisations, especially in the sector devoted to social issues
7.	Lack of staff with appropriate knowledge and experience in the field of sustainable development
8.	Employees' reluctance to apply the principle of sustainable development in their work
9.	Non-compliance with corporate social responsibility,
10.	Risk of losing the reputation of the enterprise
11.	Tensions in reconciling competitive organisational requirements
12.	Lack of employees' motivation to implement the principles of sustainable personnel management
13.	Lack of environmental efficiency standards
14.	Lack of training and education focused on sustainable development

From the analysis of the managerial responses and the barriers listed in Table 2, it should be emphasised that recruitment, selection, training and development, as well as motivation of employees are important human dimensions that contribute to improving the implementation of sustainable management principles by the employees. In order to ensure that the enterprise receives adequate staff resources and proper work performance from the employees, it is necessary that the HRM functions should be adjusted or modified so that they are sustainable. Staff members from the Human Resources department should modify the performance evaluation system in order to take into account the various dimensions of the employees' assessment of the following behavioural and technical competences: teamwork, cooperation, diversity, innovation and environmental management. Managers should discuss the employees' results and provide necessary feedback, not only at the scheduled assessment time but throughout the year. This practice will help employees to increase their knowledge, skills and work efficiency.

Full acceptance and integration of sustainable human resource management in the surveyed enterprises is not impossible, but requires a change in the approach to the existing HR practices from both management and employees. The key role of HR management staff may be to guide their superiors in achieving the full cooperation of the personnel in the implementation of the sustainable development policy, including the environmental policy, which means that HR must support their followers and create a network of problem solvers who want to act to change the current status quo.

In the enterprises that were analysed, the majority of the respondents recognised the detrimental impact of changes in human resources, such as work intensification, temporary employment, excessive performance standards and ambiguous roles in terms of an individual's well-being and the organisational culture, as well as health and family and community satisfaction.

The implementation of sustainability principles in the surveyed enterprises, including human resource management, will be difficult, due to the numerous barriers listed in Table 2. It should be emphasised that it is a difficult task, which requires the use of the methods, techniques and tools that will enable the ecological and social goals to be achieved. Only thanks to tangible and useful practical solutions, will these enterprises have the chance to transform themselves from being merely seemingly and superficially sustainable to being fully sustainable.

Conclusions

The synthetical discussion in this paper on the definition of sustainable human resource management in an organisation has not exhausted the discussed issues, but it has been sufficient to explain the essence of sustainable management, in the context of human resources. When considering management functions in the context of sustainable resources, it was assumed that human resources should be carefully planned and properly organised in order to carry out the assigned tasks, as well as properly motivated and controlled with regard to achieving sustainable development. Taking into account the definitions that have been introduced, it should be noted that sustainable human resource management includes, among other things: continuous development of the enterprise and employability competences from a long-term perspective; work-life balance, so that employees have time to rest and enjoy family and social relationships, which will affect their

health, vitality, and also reduce the risk of burnout; protecting the health of employees; equal treatment of women and men (including remuneration); creating a friendly work climate; employee commitment to minimise the negative impact of the company's operations on the natural environment.

The research question discussed in this paper was confirmed, stating that the concept of sustainable human resource management is very important in order to achieve sustainable development of the enterprise. As the entities that can stimulate the creation of sustainable enterprises are human resources, and when properly managed, they affect the building of the competitive advantage of an organisation. Enterprises choose a strategy for human resource management depending on: the situation in the labour market, the economic situation, legal regulations, demographics, changes in technology in a given enterprise, the activities of both the employers' and employees' organisations, as well as self-governing bodies, employment agencies or personnel consulting firms and capital owned by the organisation.

Sustainable personnel are not only employees who are oriented towards economic goals (both their own and the enterprises), but who are also socially and ecologically active. Ecological and social activities are manifested in three areas of their activity, which include: implementation of the enterprise's goals, work performance, and behaviour. Sustainable personnel should include both the managers and executive employees who, if properly managed, will influence the building of the competitive advantage of an organisation.

In summary, human resource management is an important part of management that deals with the most valuable resources of an organisation; that is human resources. The entire HRM context is currently being considered in the light of sustainable development. Extending this statement, it should be stated that sustainable human resource management is the most important element of a company's sustainable development, as well as in the enterprises surveyed in this paper.

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