



Sustainability and sustainable development

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SUSTAINABILITY IN HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT



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Abstract: The concept of sustainability is referred to the basic functions of human resources (HR)—recruitment, motivation, assessment and control. They should embrace sustainability, not just for organisational effectiveness and long-term economic benefits, but also for ethical reasons. Owing to SHRM, the awareness and behaviour of the whole organisation may strongly express SD goals in planning and implementing the whole corporate strategy. Frequently, the term ‘sustainable practices’ in SHRM is congruent with CSR. The main goal of the chapter is to explain how Sustainable Development Goals can be implemented in human resource management (HRM) and translated into sustainable human resource management (SHRM).

Keywords: human resource management, sustainability, sustainable human resource management.

4.1. Meaning of sustainability in human resource management

Human Resource Management (HRM) is a broad term referring to the activities associated with the management of people who do the work of organisations (Ahammad, 2017). Human resource strategies are designed to improve organisational performance and measures the impact of these strategies on it. As one of the functional strategies that follows corporate mission and vision—it has to be integrated with organisational strategic objectives and reflect organisational context (culture). And last but not least, HRM activities should improve organisational performance and effectiveness. Human capital management is to serve, among others, in (Armstrong, 2000; Romanowska, 2011):

- achieving an organization's goals;
- acquiring and retaining qualified, committed and well-motivated employees in a company;
- improving and developing people's innate capabilities through training and clearing career paths;
- building good atmosphere, particularly in relations between employees, and between employees and superiors;
- creating conditions for such a form of work that will contribute to achieving synergistic effects;
- helping a company maintain balance and adapt to the needs of various interest groups;
- guaranteeing **equal treatment**, proper and fair evaluation and appropriate rewarding of employees and managers for the contribution and results of their work;
- taking the **diversity of employees** 'needs regarding the preferred style of work and employees' aspirations into account;
- providing all employees and managers with **equal opportunities**;
- adopting flexible employee management rules, based on concern for people, fairness and transparency;
- maintaining and improving the physical and mental condition of employees.
- If the above goals were combined with the concept of SD, this would mean, among others (UNSTAT, 2020):
- promoting development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encouraging the formalisation as well as growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services;
- achieving full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value.

The term sustainable HRM (SHRM) has not been used for a long time. It is mainly implemented to identify social and human outcomes contributing to a sustainable organisation. Incorporating the SD concept reflects goals, which are dedicated to the place of work and workers. From a business perspective, the ultimate objective of the SDGs is to establish “sustainable, innovative and people-oriented” economies that improve employment opportunities, in particular, for the young generation and women. HR sustainability has been described as a symbol of an integrated, long-term people management approach, resulting in sustained business performance and employee benefits (Wilkinson, Hill, & Gollan, 2001). The mission of organisations is to ensure that their workforces are healthy and well-educated, and to nurture the awareness and proficiencies required to create productive employees and proactive citizens contributing to society (Chams & García-Blandón, 2019).

The objective of SHRM is to reach organisational targets, while striking a balance between business growth and the preservation of environmental resources (Jennings & Zandbergen, 1995; Starik & Rands, 1995). SHRM places emphasis on developing an innovative workplace with internal and external social involvement, increasing awareness and responsibility towards environmental preservation, and improving the distribution and consumption of resources to promote organisational success in a competitive environment (Kramar, 2014). Sustainable HRM concentrates on demonstrating sincerity towards employees, providing a decent work environment and conditions, development opportunities and being attentive to employees’ physical and psychosocial well-being at work (Wikhamn, 2019).

4.2. Sustainability in human resource management— recruitment and selection

The demand for new employees arises due to many reasons—with leaving the workplace by present employees, the development of new products and services, entering new markets, investing in new plants, etc. As a result, forecasting the **number** of employees’ required knowledge on:

- demand for the products;
- productivity level of the staff;
- objectives of the business.

Forecasting the **skills** required:

- following technological changes;
- flexible and multi-skilled staff.

In the sustainable recruitment approach, candidates are not treated as commodities needed to solve short-term needs of an organisation, but as a long-term investment to ensure its development and continuity. The recruiters have to know the type of position—will it be contracted or temporary staff? They also need to

analyse whether alternative solutions will be more effective. As an example, one may consider outsourcing, which is a contractual agreement between an employer and an external third-party provider, whereby the employer transfers the management of and responsibility for certain HR functions to the external provider. Responsibility during the recruiting process is connected with transparency of procedures, conditions and protection of diversity, and in accordance with the policy against discrimination.

Employee recruitment is carried out by internal recruitment among employees already employed, or external recruitment—searching for employees by the organisation or with the participation of a specialised recruitment company. The whole process may take place in several stages, and its duration depends on the position and expectations of the employer (Yakubovich & Lup, 2006):

- announcement of recruitment (job description, description of the position, responsibilities), description of the requirements (obligatory and additional), working conditions, place in the hierarchical structure, how the job will be assessed and performance measures. In many countries, it is forbidden to mention age or gender of the candidate in an announcement. Furthermore, it is not acceptable to add a photo or information about marital status;
- getting acquainted with the documents sent by the applicants (online or offline);
- pre-selection—initial assessment and selection of candidates who will be invited to the next stages of the recruitment process;
- meetings aimed at becoming better acquainted with the candidates;
- meeting with the person responsible for the candidate's target position;
- interviewing candidates (not only getting to know the candidate, but also presenting the company, its values and organisational culture);
- selection of the best candidate;
- employment—boarding.

In order to improve, but also to make the recruitment processes more sustainable, online recruitment is increasingly being used, where candidates complete standardised forms on the Internet. Often, due to the large number of candidates for certain positions, artificial intelligence is involved in that process to initially verify the list of candidates. This usually refers to basic positions, which do not require special skills from candidates.

One of the methods used to match candidates to the positions and organisational culture is recruitment through an assessment centre (AC). Due to costs and the time-consuming process, while using this method—it is often applied to a limited group of candidates—middle- or higher-level management positions. The process of recruitment consists of a few stages in which skills and personal competences of candidates are verified by means of different tools (for example, individual work or in teams). This procedure increases the probability that both the employee and organisation will be satisfied. Each position requires a different set of competences and predispositions assessed in that process to avoid disappointment or lack of satisfaction. The

decision who will be employed brings about long-term effects—the company invests in a newly-employed person, who after a few weeks of adaptation, will be a fully productive and integrated employee. The employee—will invest knowledge and skills to confirm that she/he is the best person for the position. That is why the recruitment process may take longer—to compare candidates and choose a superior applicant.

A frequent practice in the recruitment process is reaching for the recommendations of candidates for a given position.

What differs traditional recruitment from SHRM? The following recommendations for sustainability in recruitment and selection were described by Jepsen and Grob (2015):

- paperless processes;
- technology to reduce travel;
- green interviews (during an interviews, presenting an environment that demonstrates the sustainability practices of the organisation);
- in-house recruitment;
- incorporating sustainability practices into the job design;
- sustainability competences;
- flexibility to encourage applicant diversity;
- community engagement;
- induction demonstrating sustainability;
- monitoring and reporting sustainability targets.

Recruitment maybe connected with some other negative phenomena, such as nepotism and discrimination. As far as nepotism is concerned, family or any closely-related people are employed, but not on the basis of their qualifications and skills.

Other problems faced by candidates are connected with discrimination due to gender, age, family status, religion or opinions. That is why the objective criteria are applied to equal chances for all candidates. In some societies, it is difficult to overcome traditional thinking about the role of women and men. Also, age is often perceived as a barrier—one of the stereotypes is that younger means inexperienced, while older means experienced but less open to innovations and less flexible. In the long-term, both nepotism and discrimination negatively affect a company—they influence relations among employees and reduce trust in managers whether their managerial decisions are objective and fair or not.

4.3. Employer branding and sustainability

Seeking specific, qualified employees for any position has always been a real challenge for all companies in the modern economy. Since employees have become part of the businesses' overall brand image, employers are responsible not only for product brands, but also for those corporate.

The employer brand can be defined as “the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment and identified with the company employing workers” (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). The main role of EB is to provide a coherent framework for management, to simplify and focus priorities, increase productivity and improve recruitment, retention and commitment. Defining employer branding similarly as “a targeted, long-term strategy to manage the awareness and perceptions of employees, potential employees, and related stakeholders with regards to a particular firm” (Sullivan, 2004). Through employer branding, the organisation expects to be differentiated from other companies in competition for the best present and future employees, by highlighting the unique aspects of a firm as an employer. Employer branding in the context of recruitment is the package of psychological, economic and functional benefits that potential employees associate with employment at a particular company (Wilden, Gudergan, & Lings, 2010).

Employer branding brings some advantages to companies:

- reduced cost of employee acquisition;
- improved employee relations;
- increased employee retention, higher loyalty.

Knowledge of them benefits organisations that want to create an attractive and competitive employer brand. To do that, an organisation has to create EVP—Employee Value Proposition, which is the indication of the main attributes of a given company and benefits that would result from starting work at it. This conveys “value proposition”, which consists of the organisation’s culture, systems, attitudes, and employee relationships, along with encouraging people to embrace and share goals of success, productivity and satisfaction, both on individual and professional levels. As far as sustainability-oriented organisations are concerned, those values may be connected with areas described in the 3P model—people, planet, profit—protection of the natural environment and protecting human rights. Sustainable organisations communicate their attitude towards the brand to society, the natural environment and the way of achieving economic goals in a sustainable way (Jepsen & Grob, 2015). It worth adding that according to the Randstad Report (2018), employees expect, among others: fair salary and benefits, job security, work-life balance, work atmosphere, career progression (...).

SDGs are often implemented in organisations by means of CSR tools (Stefańska, 2018). Undoubtedly, CSR tools are concentrated on employees to strengthen a positive internal image, as well as to transfer the satisfaction from an employee to the outside environment. This is indicated, among others, by Korschun, Bhattacharya and Swain (2014) and Lin, Tsai, Joe, & Chiu (2012), according to whom:

- CSR can indirectly strengthen the company’s ability to meet the needs of buyers through the observation and behaviour of employees;

- customers' belief regarding the social involvement of employees gives rise to greater acceptance of lower-/worse-quality services;
- thanks to CSR, it is possible to achieve a greater level of employee orientation towards meeting the needs of customers;
- socially engaged enterprises attract better employees, stemming from, among other factors, the employees' expectations to be identified with organisations having a positive image.

The process of employer brand creation includes the following stages (Stefańska & Bilińska-Reformat, 2020):

- identification of competitors and criteria for perceiving competitors' brands, as well as what associations and emotions they elicit to indicate competitors' strengths and weaknesses;
- identification of own image and key values attributed to the brand of the organisation (for example: ecological orientation, fair treatment and respect of employees, employee-friendly atmosphere and encouraging initiatives, transparent policy towards employment and professional advancement);
- identification of expectations regarding potential and current employees (organisation which is transparent, creative, respectful, ecologically oriented);
- defining the basis of values on which employer brand image will be built (EVP);
- selection of appropriate tools and communication channels for employer brand image;
- evaluation of action efficiency and effectiveness in terms of the level of target achievement and comparison of results to incurred costs.

The policy of creating an EB exercised in an organisation is focused on 2 target groups: future employees and already employed persons (Stefańska & Bilińska-Reformat, 2020, Tumasjan, Kunze, Bruch, & Welp, 2020). The different situation of both groups inspires diversification of the tools used for building the employer brand. Studies conducted in the first group are now focused on the communication channels, the use of the Internet, especially, social media. In the case of already employed workers, it supports building loyalty, commitment or the motivation to work, career and talent management, while, at the same time, discouraging employees from changing their workplace. It also allows workers to stay active on the labour market longer.

There is an expectation to work for sustainable organisations among younger generations—generation Z and also younger representatives of generation Y. For them, the fact that a company implements SD goals, and carries out a transparent policy of employment and development for employees, they are encouraged to work for such organisations and to be loyal.

4.4. Motivation and sustainability in human resource management

Motivation is what makes people act. An organisation can have strong influence on employees' motivations—people work to satisfy their needs, however, what type of needs they are—that depends.

Theories of motivation usually do not directly use such terms as: sustainable development or sustainability. But when one looks deeper – they strongly refer to such values as respect, safety, well-being, engagement, transparency, diversity and others—as values which build a positive work environment and motivate people. And these are the core values promoted by SD.

According to Maslow (1943), people cannot think about development and satisfying higher needs if their physiological ones are not satisfied. Also the need for safety and self-protection, if not satisfied – does not allow to move onto higher aspirations—affiliation and belonging, as well as status, self-esteem and self-actualisation (Maslow's hierarchy of needs).

Herzberg's two-factor theory, also known as motivation-hygiene theory, was originally intended to address employee motivation and recognised 2 sources of job satisfaction. He argued that motivating factors influence job satisfaction because they are based on an individual's need for personal growth: achievement, recognition, work itself, responsibility and advancement. On the other hand, hygiene factors, which represented deficiency needs, defined the professional context and could make individuals unhappy with their job: company policy and administration, supervision, salary, interpersonal relationships and working conditions (Haque, Haque, & Islam, 2014).

In Skinner's operant conditioning theory, positive reinforcement is identified as promoters that increase the possibility of the desired behaviour's repetition: praise, appreciation, a good grade, trophy, money, promotion or any other reward (McLeod, 2018).

Locke's goal-setting theory, an integrative model of motivation, allows to view goals as key determinants of behaviour. The goal-setting theory stresses goal specificity, difficulty and acceptance, further providing guidelines for their incorporation into incentive programmes and management by objective (MBO) techniques in many areas (Locke & Latham, 2002).

Douglas McGregor proposed 2 theories, theory X and theory Y, to explain employee motivation and its implications for management. In his opinion, one may find employees who avoid work (theory X) and dislike responsibility, and employees who enjoy work and exert effort when they have control in the workplace (theory Y). He recommended that to motivate employees who avoid work, the company needs to enforce rules and implement punishment. For employees positively driven to work, management must develop opportunities for them to take on responsibility and show creativity as a way of motivation (Kopelman, Prottas, & Davis, 2008).

Adams' equity theory is about the balance between the effort an employee puts into his/her work (input), and the result she/he achieves in return (output) (Mulder, 2018). Input includes hard work, loyalty, social skills, experience, knowledge, efforts and enthusiasm. Output can be: financial—like salary, or non-financial—such as recognition and responsibility. A good example is empowerment—proof of trust towards an employee. The expected balance between input and output occurs when an employee feels satisfied and motivated, contributing to productivity. According to this researcher, employees view being treated fairly and equally to be of great significance. This ensures that they will be motivated at work. It is treating various employees differently and unfairly that leads to bad blood and damaging people's motivation.

In the selected theories presented above, there is no direct mention of sustainability. However, they allow to underline the fact that such values as respect, engagement, diversity, decent work conditions and ethical standards of employees are necessary for the high engagement and commitment of employees.

Nowadays, professional burnout, stress at work, health problems or difficulties in balancing work-related duties and private life are extremely relevant challenges. Such a situation leads to HRM rethinking if companies are willing to have employees when conducting business in the future. Among good practices in SHRM, the following may be found:

- contract or fair service contract employment;
- regulations against any form of discrimination;
- whistle-blowing policies;
- transparency—especially in recruitment and assessment;
- equipment to facilitate physical work;
- fairly paid overtime;
- diversity policies;
- responsible policy of redundancy;
- internship (paid).

Employees can be motivated by means of both material and non-material benefits. Of course, salary determines one's decision about the place of work and employer. In previous decades, specific solutions, e.g. offering health-care, child-care facilities or kindergartens for employees' children, sports vouchers or voluntary pension systems are more often indicated among financially-based tools (Olejnik & Stefańska, 2020).

No less important is the form of employment as a motivating element to work at a given company. One of the elements of building employee safety is an employment contract—long-term or indefinite. Temporary contracts leave employees with an uncertainty about their future. In addition, they lose some employment rights, and in the situation of wanting to obtain a loan, such an employee is considered inferior. As a result, full-time employment is a source of stability. However, part-time and

temporary employment contracts result from the fact that the employee is hired to perform specific tasks or as a replacement and, after termination of the contract—it most likely will not be renewed. This type of employment is suitable for people looking for temporary work.

4.5. Remote work and sustainable development

Among problems faced by employers who search for the most talented candidates, is low willingness of applicants to move from their current place of residence to the place of work (relocation). Mobility is often one of the conditions, especially in international organisations or organisations with facilities at different locations in the country or around the world. Long distances seems to be an obstacle in some types of jobs, however, they create new chances for people whose duties do not require attendance at the office. To secure “work-life balance”, employers offer candidates the possibility of remote work—if adoptable for some types of jobs. It is worth mentioning that the problems are not equally important for workers from different generations, different cultures or with varying marital status. One of the solutions is remote work.

With the development of ICT, the interest in remote work has increased. Its spread was caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, forcing many workplaces to make employees work remotely—from home. Tele-working comes with certain advantages—less time is spent commuting to work, more time is spent at home with one’s family. Time is used efficiently. On the other hand, the lack of direct contact with colleagues, superiors or clients may weaken the relationships between employees. The possibilities of carrying out some tasks based on teamwork are also limited, although the barrier may lie more in being used to face-to-face meetings than online cooperation. The tools used for remote work largely replace direct contact, but also lead to greater formalisation. Nonetheless, it is worth adding that remote work also leads to the reduction of utilised materials, because communication is based, to a greater extent, on messages in electronic form than on paper.

4.6. Reduction of employment in responsible organisations

Human resource management is also linked to employment reduction policy. The reasons for limiting the number of employees lie both in the part of the company and external factors: change of strategy, organisational structure, resource optimisation, resigning from certain products, management errors and unfavourable

financial situation, closing or relocation of plants to other places—reasons on the part of the organisation. In contrast, economic crises, natural disasters, legislative and technological changes also become a reason for reducing employment.

The procedures for dismissal of employees are specified in the Labour Code, including notice periods or severance pay. In the case of collective redundancies, they are also subject to negotiations between management boards of companies and trade unions. Nevertheless, companies that implement a Corporate Social Responsibility strategy and build positive relationships with employees introduce additional solutions to help employees going through a change. These include, among others:

- employee re-training programmes;
- job search assistance for departing employees;
- clearance;
- psychological support;
- mentoring programmes.

Questions / tasks

1. What is sustainable human resource management? What are the differences when compared to human resource management?
2. One of the SD goals is defined in the following way: the SD goal is to promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all. What does this mean to you?
3. How can SD goals be carried out in the field of recruitment?
4. What do you think about the participation of artificial intelligence in employee recruitment processes?
5. Is hiring an employee for a given position on the basis of being recommended by another employee from the organisation a good practice?
6. Discuss stereotypes in recruitment. How can they be overcome?
7. Is sustainability in corporate recruitment strategy an important factor influencing candidates?
8. Find 2 announcements for the same type of position on different websites. Do you see any similarities? Differences? Which one seems to be more sustainable? Do they mention sustainability in any form?
9. Define the EVP of a sustainable company and find example(s).
10. Your application for a job was accepted by 2 companies. You have to choose—one with higher salary at a company which does not offer EVP based on sustainability, and the other, at which their EVP is based on sustainability, but the salary is lower by about 8-10% (with the option of an increase during the next year). Which would you choose—explain.
11. Explain the theories of motivation.

12. Minimum wage was set up to protect employees interests. Does it work?
13. Do benefits offered by employers influence engagement and loyalty?
14. What is empowerment? How does it influence employee engagement?
15. How do job enlargement and job enrichment influence employee motivation?
16. Many countries test the model of basic unconditional income. What do you think about it in the context of needs and motivations? (see: <https://www.dw.com/en/basic-income-germany-tax-free/a-54700872>; and also <https://www.ifo.de/DocDL/CESifo-Forum-2018-3-de-wispelaere-halmetois-pulkka-unconditional-basic-income-september.pdf>).
17. One of the factors influencing employment are parities. According to some candidates, this is a factor that causes unequal competition for a given position. What is your opinion on the subject? Discuss the pros and cons.
18. What knowledge, skills and social competences are particularly desirable in future employees?
19. Many jobs will disappear from the market in coming years. Will newly created jobs in other sectors balance this process? How can the quality of life among people who are unemployed and do not have the competences expected by many employers be taken care of?

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