

Sustainable Issues in Human Resource Management

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ABSTRACT

Sustainability itself is an important aspect in management and research practice. This is the topic which is related with almost every aspect of human life. But Sustainable Human Resource Management has not gained that much attention which it should had and it is not clear yet. In this regard, the present paper endeavours towards a concrete definition of sustainable HRM as per provided by Human Resource Experts and the paper describes the significance of application of the sustainability concept into HRM. The paper also offers conceptual insights linking sustainability & HRM, this may aid to arise new avenues for future theoretical and empirical research.

Keywords: Human Resource Management, Sustainability, Sustainable Human Resource Management, Sustainable Work Systems, Sustainable Resource Management.

I INTRODUCTION

In the recent times there have been abundant change due to technological developments, globalization and cut throat competition which have affected the organizations inwardly and outwardly. These changes have transformed the practices of general Human Resource Management. The role of HRM is being viewed as strategic decision making apart from its traditional roles and responsibilities. The rise in importance of HR and HRM has fuelled a quickly expanding stream of research (Martín-Alcázar, Romero-Fernández & Sánchez-Gardey, 2005). As per Wright, Dunford & Snell (2001) resource orientation and strategy in HRM have increased over the period of time. According to Brewster & Suutari, (2005), Human Resource Management has been taken as critical component of the organization. For instance very highly qualified international managers and their competencies and knowledges are considered as very important for the organizations.

At present the biggest problem which organizations are facing that they have shortage of talented staff (Thom & Zaugg, 2004).

The concept of sustainability is imperative for reconsidering in how to manage human resources practically (Ehnert, 2009a). The relevance of sustainable human resource management can be justified by the views given by (Ehnert & Harry, 2012). First argument in this regard is that organizations work in social & economic environment so human resource management cannot ignore the societal discussion on sustainability. Secondly, because of shortage of human resources, aging population & increased work related health issues, sustainability of human resource management itself becomes very important for the organizations.

Recognizing the challenges in describing the concept of sustainability, three distinct lucidities of sustainability for the HRM context may be distinguished: normative, efficiency-oriented, and substance-oriented (Ehnert, 2006, 2009a, 2009b, 2011). Founded on dissimilar classification of sustainability for HRM context three theoretical methods link sustainability and HRM: Sustainable Work Systems, Sustainable Resource Management & Sustainable HRM. The literature on Sustainable Work Systems perceives sustainability as social responsibility, the elementary research purpose is work intensity & the objective is to advance the understanding of the mechanisms leading towards human resource exploitation or development. The chief aim of Sustainable Resource Management is to offer a description for mutual exchange relationships between organization & its environments & how to deal with rare resources. While Sustainable HRM treats sustainability as a conjoint benefit for all groups of the shareholders & as a contribution to long economic sustainability. The contrast of approaches permits to conclude that variety of approaches offer diverse perspectives regarding important queries (Ehnert, 2009b) such as how future supply with motivated & qualified employees can be managed; how negative effect of HRM can be controlled; who is responsible for sustainability implication in HRM.

II SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Though sustainability is an imperative matter in the arena of management research & in practice with this idea is developing in more & more organisations, but it has gained comparatively little attention from HR researchers (Boudreau & Ramstad, 2005; Thom & Zaugg, 2004). The literature connecting sustainability & HRM is extensively distributed across disciplines, varied in its clarification of sustainability, & hardly interconnected with mainstream HRM literature. The diverse methods to sustainability in HRM have not been studied & compared systematically. The present papers makes an attempt to highlight prevailing relations between sustainability issues & HRM on both micro & macro levels of analysis.

III METHODOLOGY

The paper is constructed on the analysis and review of literature. This enables to define the notion of sustainability by offering the historic expansion of sustainability meaning. The selected technique permits to emphasize the significance of sustainability for HRM from the point of investigators. To carry out the present research, secondary data has been used.

Analysis & Discussion

Description of sustainability as a concept

In recent years, sustainability has become a popular concern (Wilkinson, 2004). Long-term, durable, sound, or "systematic" have all been used as synonyms for "sustainability" (Leal Filho, 2000). Traditionally the notion of sustainability established from an economic concept to the concept appropriate to HRM & the development of idea can be divided in some stages. Firstly, the origins of sustainability lies in the Aristotel's idea of a household that was characterised by the aptitude to produce & reproduce all what was required for the living (Ehnert, 2009b). Secondly, from the 12th century the notion of sustainability was applied in forestry sector underlying the requirement for harmonizing wood consumption & regeneration (Leal Filho, 2000; Ehnert, 2009a). Finally, the ecological movement, which was worried about the overuse of natural resources, embraced the concept of sustainability. Fourth, the word "sustainability" became one of the most significant concepts in strategic management in 1980, meaning that businesses can achieve long-term competitive advantage (Kazlauskaitė & Buciniene, 2008). Next, Elkington (1997) applied the societal notion of sustainability to the corporate business level, arguing that the financial, ecological, and social "bottom lines" must all be treated equally for long-term success. Identifying the facts that most business executives think that corporate sustainability is a need for conducting business (Dyllick & Hockerts, 2002) and that sustainable business strategies are viewed as snowballing profits while responding to stakeholder demands (Kiron, Kruschwitz, Haanaes & von Streng Velken, 2012).

Beginning from 2000 the sustainability is more & more connected with HRM (Zaugg, Blum & Thom, 2001). In human resource terms this means a shift in importance away from human management to resource management with the argument that organisations need to allow the ambitions of people to be placed at the heart of the workplace (Gollan, 2004, as cited in Wilkinson, 2004).

IV SIGNIFICANCE OF SUSTAINABILITY FOR HRM

Research on connection between sustainability & HRM until now has remained scarce (Cohen, Taylor & Müller-Camen, 2012; Ehnert & Harry, 2012), the question of sustainability significance for HRM is more than discerning. Sustainable HRM is a wider concept than Strategic HRM (Ehnert, 2011). As per Boudreau & Ramstad (2005), the conventional business paradigm struggles to gain financial returns & HRM retorts with strategic logic displaying the involvement of human resources also defined in financial terms. As a result, the most effective organisation is one that increases financial returns. The concept of sustainability, on the other hand, takes the place of an understanding of success. According to Schuler and Jackson (2005), success entails addressing the current wants of existing stockholders while also anticipating their future requirements. Boudreau & Ramstad (2005) argue that sustainability is attaining success today without compromising the needs of the future. The above said points reinforce the idea that sustainability must become a part of HRM (Boudreau, 2003), nevertheless the fact that traditionally the link of sustainability and HRM is related with situations of crises when problems come due to labour (skills) shortage or problems occur because of HRM negative effects

on employees (Ehnert, 2009b). Concerning the first argument, numerous organizations today focus with the shortage of extremely skilled & motivated employee, hereby the significance of sustainability for HRM is connected with probability for organization to become an employer-of-choice due to dimensions of the “triple-bottom-line” (Lis, 2012).

Taylor, Osland & Egri (2012) establish two types of arguments why sustainability is significant for HRM. To begin, HRM assists in guiding employees' mindsets and behaviours toward achieving sustainable goals (HRM is treated as means). Second, HRM systems that promote workers' long-term physical, social, and economic well-being might include sustainability concepts.

Ehnert and Harry (2012) emphasise the organization's connection to its economic and social contexts, as well as HRM's ability to contribute to long-term growth. Furthermore, companies must deal with difficulties such as a scarcity of human resources, an ageing population, and negative HRM consequences, all of which call into question HRM's role in long-term sustainability. It may be concluded that adding sustainability as a concept for HRM is a viable solution for firms to tackle the aforementioned HRM problems. The lucidities that underpin HRM's sustainability, on the other hand, are different.

V THE LOGICS OF SUSTAINABILITY FOR HRM

Three logics of sustainability for HRM offer description why the organizations commit themselves to sustainability (Ehnert, 2009a): normative; efficiency-oriented; substance-oriented.

The first one i.e. normative also can be termed as social responsibility is grounded on the description provided by Hülsmann and Grapp (2005) which establishes that persons on the mutual & personal level should not ingest the substance but in its place live on the output. As per Ehnert (2011), the repercussion of normative understanding needs to treat employees in a socially manner, to nurture employees well-being & to decrease the influence of work.

Next, the notion of the efficiency-oriented rationality is founded on duality: the first choice is to lesser the use of resources through novelties, this decision is to utilize the resources more efficiently (Hülsmann & Grapp, 2005). In the Human Resource Management framework the inferences are to lessen the effect on the human resources & to decline the utilisation of human resources (Ehnert, 2011).

Further, the substance-oriented rationality of sustainability emphasises on preserving the resource basis by taking into consideration the effects of decision making procedures. From that perspective two facets are of the great prominence: the resource-base has to be conserved by investing in its reproduction & a balance between the consumption & the supply of resources has to be established (Müller-Christ, 2001). And in the Human Resource Management context the inferences is to equilibrium the consumption & reproduction of human resources in two methods: nurturing the renewal of human resources & spending into origin of these resources: universities, education systems and etc. (Ehnert, 2011).

All three considerations as discussed above highpoint challenges for organizations: firstly, enormous number of organizations feel outside pressure to become economically, ecologically & socially sustainable; secondly, organizations feel interior pressure which raises the attention to the problem of human sustainability.

VI METHODOLOGIES TO LINK SUSTAINABILITY & HRM

Ehnert (2009b) identified three main streams of literature to apply the idea of sustainability for HRM matters such as: Sustainable Work Systems, Sustainable Resource Management, and Sustainable HRM.

Docherty et al. (2002) states that sustainability includes three levels: the individual, the organizational & the societal. Sustainability at one level cannot be constructed on the mistreatment of the others. These levels are closely connected to the organization's main stakeholders such as personnel, customers, owners & society. A precondition for sustainability at the system level (individual, organizational or societal) is to attain a balance between stakeholders' needs & objectives at different levels concurrently. The central objective in Sustainable Work Systems is work intensity emphasising that the idea of intensive work systems is connected to consumption of human resources physically, cognitively, socially and emotionally. While Sustainable Work Systems are thought to lead to balance between working life quality & performance of organization (Ehnert, 2009b). It deals with supply of qualified and motivated human resources can be ensured by regeneration and development of human and social resources (Docherty et al., 2002).

Next one is sustainable resource management which deals with to frame the new rationality for how to deal with corporate resources trying to clarify resource shortage with dysfunction of sources of the resources (Müller-Christ, 2001). It is based on the assumption that the organizations live because they exposed their borders & they manage the balance of mutually “opening” and “maintaining” their boundaries. Secondly, the organizations survive because they band with each other to reproduce the human resource base & because they generate mutual exchange relationships. And, the organizations survive because they manage sustaining & reproducing their resource base in their environments.

Last methodology is Sustainable HRM in which first input in defining Sustainable HRM was provided by the representatives of the University of Bern, suggesting the first organised, theoretically & empirically substantiated concept for a Sustainable HRM. It was demarcated as “those long-term oriented conceptual approaches & activities intended at a socially responsible & economically suitable recruitment & selection, development, placement, & release of employees” (Thom & Zaugg, 2004). Thom & Zaugg (2004) recommended that Sustainable HRM is mainly for organizational change situations as these frequently make too great demands on the persons involved. Sustainable HRM underlines such objects: increasing the employees’ employability; using participatory management models to improve individual responsibility & confirming a pleasant work-life balance (Zaugg, Blum & Thom, 2001).

The methodology of Sustainable HRM provides: future supply with qualified & motivated human resources that can be confirmed through human resource development, design of reward systems as well as contemplation of sustainability in the corporation’s objectives (Thom, 2002), next is to prevent the negative effects of HRM and it can be achieved if employees act in a self-responsible manner, partakes in decisions, & if HRM operates as a ‘guardian of HR’ with the aim to sustainance & to deploy human resources in a manner that the employee’s long-term development & performance is not affected but enriched” (Zaugg, 2002) and the organizations, employees, & society are equally in charge for sustainable activities; the inference is that the accountability is extended to employees’ responsibility for themselves & for their careers. To sum up, it is worth to highpoint that numerous streams of literature applying the idea of sustainability for human resource issues offers diverse understanding, employ dissimilar rationalities of sustainability for HRM, however cover the grounding that sustainability is suitable idea for human resource management.

VII CONCLUSION

Sustainability needs economic, social & environmental partnership this partnership would aid each partner to do traditional tasks more professionally & to touch synergy. Sustainability is normally linked to traditional HRM through the traditional human resource paradigm such as service delivery, client satisfaction, worker representation, child labour (Boudreau, 2003), though perceiving &, furthermore, recognising the variations inside & outside organizations and new challenges for HRM, as the problem of shortage of human resources & negative effect of HRM on employees, sustainable HRM is treated as an extension of strategic HRM (Freitas et al., 2011).

The present paper made an attempt to insights on sustainability meaning, highlight the significance of sustainability for HRM, moreover presented notions on how sustainability can be connected to HRM. Approach of Sustainable HRM tries to equilibrium economic rationality & social responsibility concurrently & the Sustainable Resource Management examine sustainability as an economic rationality (Ehnert & Harry, 2012). At this stage it is pertinent to emphasise that for the organizations endeavouring to certify the energy is not sufficient to attach the term sustainability to HRM, the actions should be taken in order not to increase prospects without results (Boudreau, 2003). As a consequences of actions the empirical research on how organizations perceive sustainable HRM, how implement sustainable HRM and how employees perceive the practice is on demand.

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