PSYCHO-SOCIAL FACTORS THAT PROMOTE ORGANIZATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY AND INNOVATION

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Abstract: Human capital represents the key to organizational sustainability through both its role in implementing strategies and policies and by its potential for innovation and adaptability. Analyzing and fostering the organizational factors that promote innovation is not only sound human resources practice, but also a fertile ground for organizational research in the field of organizational climate and work style. The present article reviews the most recent research regarding organizational climate and work style and provides a few ideas regarding the connection between the two concepts and sustainability, as well as innovation. It also analyses research data regarding the impact of organizational climate on employees’ work styles as an argument for the importance of creating and developing a positive organizational climate for the sustainable human resources management.

Key words: sustainability, ethical sustainability, organizational climate, work style, innovation
Jel: I20, J21, J63

1. Introduction

As defined in its basic meaning, sustainability requires not only the wise and efficient use of the natural and technological resources, but also human resources development at all levels. In a nutshell, human resources development represents the key to sustainability through both its role in implementing strategies and policies and by its potential for innovation and adaptability.

The research results presented in this article are part of a larger study on the problem of the impact of organizational climate and work style on employee turnover. The objective of this phase of the study was to emphasize the influences of the perceived organizational climate on the individuals’ work style and its factors as professional potential and personality structure. The study aimed to reveal some of the connections between organizational climate and the employees’ work style factors as an argument for the need to promote and develop those dimensions of the organizational environment that foster sustainability and innovation.

The following analysis focuses on the identifying the patterns of a positive organizational climate that fosters the employees’ work styles, especially those traits relevant for organizational sustainability and innovation.

2. Literature review

The finality of sustainability is closely related to the human resources as both beneficiary and future implementing factor. Consequently, human capital represents that component without which national and organizational welfare, strategic investments and long-time planning have no meaning (Dumitrana, Dumitru, Jianu, Jinga, & Radu, 2009).

More than that, as Chen (2012) points out, the connection between the analyses, continuous training and long-term investments in human resources on one side and sustainability on the other is of an ethical nature. In his work, the above-mentioned author, analyses the moral fundamentals of sustainability and pleads for an approach that covers the virtues that both organizational management / leaders and employees need to put into use in order to maintain the ethical bases of sustainability. Under these circumstances, the investments in human resources become a necessity and an imperative with ethical connotations.

The concept of sustainability has suffered different transformations and applications from society to organizational level, where it is called “organizational sustainability” (Gănescu, 2012). Whatever the terms, this shift to the organizational level offers a practical perspective over the role of human resources in sustainability as both implementing factor of organizational strategies and a continuously growing resource.

This is why continuous personnel training and implementing new long-term educational strategies represent key steps of sustainability at organizational level. (Angheluță, Margina, Zaharia, & Arionesei, 2014)

Of the three dimensions of sustainability (economic, social and environmental), the social one proves to be one of great challenge and enormous potential. Since 1990, when UNDP Human Development Report firstly introduced...
2.1. The impact of sustainable strategies on human resources

Sustainability strategies implemented at organizational level are related to work higher morale level among employees, a stronger public image, increased personnel loyalty and brand development. Indirectly, employees perceived level of welfare, their physical and psychological health and their professional self-image suffered significant improvements. Long-term investments in continuous personal training accompany organizational culture change and drives employees to become more adaptive, better equipped with scouts required by continuously changing labour market. (Dumitrana, Dumitr, Jianu, Jinga, & Radu, 2009)

Liebowitz (2010) supports the necessity of human resources managers’ involvement in creating and developing a culture of sustainability at organizational level. Consequently, all phases and processes of human resources management from recruitment to mentoring are suffering essential transformations to integrate sustainability strategies. A human resources management focused on sustainability will be capable to attract, employ and retain those professionals capable to internalize and actively participate in fulfilling the organization’s mission and objectives. It will also contribute to creating an organizational climate that supports informal learning processes, encourages performance and facilitates a balance between work and the private life of employees.

2.2. Relevant sustainability variables for human resources development

A review of the literature relevant for the problem of organizational sustainability provides a series of indicators that should be followed in order to assess the areas of human resources management that are directly linked to sustainability processes: personnel motivation (downtime, cost of occupational accidents, cost benefit motivation analysis, training costs, employee participation to profit, work satisfaction level, time spent in the organization, training costs per employee, number of employees that should acquire strategic competencies / number of employees that already have these competencies, training participation rates etc.), performance and evaluation (social performance: the intensity off employee’s participation to fulfilling companies objectives; human performance: individual work results), organizational climate (employee turnover versus loyalty rates, personal fluctuation costs, absenteeism, work conflicts (frequency, intensity, magnitude etc.) (Dumitrana, Dumitr, Jianu, Jinga, & Radu, 2009); global indicators: functional costs of human resources / total costs, the time necessary four task fulfilment etc. (Boudreau, 2003).

A large portion of the indicators mentioned above are directly linked to the concepts of organizational climate and work style, therefore proving the importance of these two variables for organizational sustainability.

2.3. The importance of work style for innovation and sustainable organizational development

Workstyle is heterogeneous concept that combines motivational, emotional, cognitive, potential, attitudinal and psychosocial factors which determine the unique individuals way of working and using his/her resources to reach professional targets (both individual and organizational). The defining factors of work style are: decision-making, flexibility, work involvement, self-management skills, competitiveness, creativity, information-processing style, and orientation towards the others. Each of the work style factors combine different components (attitudinal, motivational, emotional, cognitive, psychosocial) in order to reflect relevant aspects of individuals’ behaviour in organizational environment and the way they perceive work related tasks and objectives.

The concept of work style involves the continuous practice of creative potential in environment established by the organization climate of the institution. The junction between personal resources of the employees and positive organizational climate creates the context for innovation.

There are three different individual components that promote employee’s innovation, especially in group activities: expertise, creative thinking and intrinsic motivation (Anderson, Potočnik, & Zhou, 2014). As one of these components, creativity represents not only a skill, but also a systematic attitude and an essential work style factor.

If it’s true that the results and welfare of the organization depend directly of each employee, then the importance of their work style becomes an indisputable reality even for the uninformed observer. Large portion of the organization’s outcomes largely depends upon the suitable matching between the employee and his job requirements.

From a systemic point of view the organization is not just the sum of its employees, but also a structure of relationships and roles greatly impacted by each individual’s work style. The latter has a significant influence on organizational climate and, in its turn, it is nurtured by the culture and climate of the institution.

It is because of the differences in work styles and visions on the organizations climate and objectives that some of the most manageable conflicts appear in the workplace. According to some assessments, personality and work style conflicts “account for more than two thirds of employees quitting or being terminated” (Totton, 1994).
2.4. Towards an innovative, sustainability oriented organizational climate

An overview of the research studies regarding creativity and innovation in organizations realized by Anderson, Potočnik și Zhou (2014) concluded that the environment / climate in which the employees work and spend most of their time significantly impact their creativity which, in its own turn, influences greatly the organizational innovation. Of the organizational factors that mostly influence employees’ creativity, the most frequently analyzed are you organizational motivation (factor of organizational climate), resources (financial, human, time) and management practices (organizational control - the paternal type (Zhou, 2009), transformational leadership style (Sarros, Cooper, & Santora, 2008), ambidextrous leadership (Rosing, Frese, & Bauch, 2011), charismatic leadership (Paulsen, Maldonado, Callan, & Ayoko, 2009). The latter of the factors is in close connection with organizational climate considering that employees’ perceptions regarding the decision-making processes and managerial practices directly affect the organization climate of the institution they work in.

In a broader context, the pluri-disciplinary approaches the organizational culture with a direct stake in understanding organizational climate have suggested concepts and terms such as: “executive culture”, which refers to the stakeholders interests and to social responsibility issues, “scientific organizational culture”, which values exploration innovation sometimes at the expense of ethical dimension of professional activity, “safety culture”, which values safe use of technology etc (Schein, 2010). Scientific culture of an organization presents a relevant approach for the study of innovation and its links to the organizational climate factors.

In this line of research Schneider (1975, apud Schneider, Ehrhart, & Macey, 2011) was one of the first suggested focusing research efforts on organizational climate, specifically its purposes and effects on employees behavior. In consequence different types of organizational climate such as requirement for productivity, for effort, for personnel turnover, for welfare, for safety or for innovation could represent specific research objectives.

Following a few decades of studies, Marshak și Heracleous (2007) review the main types of organizational climates described and analyzed by various researchers:

- **Services climate**, proposed by Schneider and measured most often by SERVQUAL (developed by Zeithaml). The main dimensions of this type of climate are: accessibility, fidelity, responsibility, insurance and empathy.
- **Safety climate**, defined by Zohar as that type of climate created by the organization members share similar concerns for personnel safety and welfare.
- **Ethical climate**, described by Bart Victor and John Cullen, which includes different aspects connected to moral reasoning and locus of control regarding issues or activities replace organization in provocative areas from a moral point of view. Studies such as the ones carried out by Tseng și Fan (2011) have proved the value of the concept for organizational processes such as information management.
- **Innovation climate**, described by Neil Anderson and Michael West, consist of different aspects regarding teamwork and the different ways in which the organization’s procedures and structures facilitate creativity and innovation.
- **Silence climate** is a dysfunctional type defined by Elizabeth Wolf Morrison and Francis Milliken. It consists of a pattern of interactions inside the organization that enables employees withhold information regarding the problems they identify in their activity and in the relationships with colleagues at a different hierarchical levels.
- **Fear climate** is a concept based on the notion of emotional climate, developed by Joseph de Rivera, which consists in the analysis of employees’ fears and anxieties in the organization.

Of all the types of organizational climates described above, the innovation climate is especially relevant for the topic of this paper. Considering the fact that new, applicable, productive ideas are born from spontaneous, non-mediated, interdisciplinary interactions of employees working in different departments, an organizational climate focused on innovation can act as a catalyst for creative group processes, especially for those regarding long term problem-solving.

More than that, as King et al (2007) demonstrate, the organizational climate focused on innovation helps employees develop coping mechanisms that fight the negative effects of overloading and the ever raising demands for organizational performance.

3. Research methods

The data analyzed for this study has been gathered from a sample of 58 participants, employees of governmental agencies and other state institutions from Iași, Romania. Aged between 22 and 54, the participants have voluntarily provided information and personal evaluations regarding their work style and the organizational climate at their workplace.

The measure of the two main variables of the study has been accomplished by using instruments: SM II Questionnaire (developed by Niculită, Z.) as a measure of work style and ECO (developed by Constantin, T.) - an
The SM II Questionnaire has been tested on a 200 participants sample and validated by a committee of experts. The reliability of the questionnaire is estimated at alpha Cronbach=0,866 for the total factor and values between 0,800 to 0,873 for the 7 sub-factors.

The assessment of employees work styles using the SM II Questionnaire is based on a model that includes the existence of a composite work style factor, consisting of cognitive motivational attitudinal and psychosocial sub-factors. Each individual tested within the model’s frame is attributed a score placed on a bipolar scale between dynamic and structured work style. The dynamic work style is fluent, innovative, intuitive, highly involved in working activities, competitive and creative. A person that scores high on the work styles scale is usually flexible, rather impulsive, makes decisions based on intuition, discarding the quality in favor of speeding the process. He or she integrates easily in the work rhythm imposed by the organization, adapts on the go to the changes in work plans and methods, appreciate originality and change. Such a person is highly interested in the chosen professional field, capable of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014), striving for performance. Highly motivated and dedicated to reaching the organizational goals, he or she avoids routine in professional activities and uses his / her strengths in order to achieve professional targets. The weakness of such a work style is represented by the reduced capacity for time and project management. This is not because of reduced planning abilities but rather a natural effect of the person’s high flexibility. A dynamic work style employee is usually impatient when it comes to implementing original ideas. This is one of the reasons for his / her constant preference for work teams, which allows him / her to avoid unpleasant tasks while having the opportunity to compete and perform.

Situated at the opposite pole of the continuum, the structured work style is characterized by a highly organized way of working and developing professional relationships in the workplace. Such a person characterized by a structured work style carefully analyses every detail of the problem before making a decision and chooses the logic solution against the one subjectively preferred. One of the main traits of this style and an important weakness is the low level of flexibility in every aspect in the professional activity, paired with a disregard for the new ideas, considered disruptive and counter-productive. Such a person appreciates order and feels unbalanced major changes. His / her greatest strength is the high-level of time and project management, including efficiency, perseverance, prioritizing, detailed planning of each activity and good evaluation skills. Although such a person is less creative, he / she keeps a constant work rhythm, which may prove to be a valuable asset when it comes to reaching organizational objectives and standards. Because of his / her focused, structured work style, a person who scores low on the work style scale feels disturbed by the seemingly hectic work habits of his / her colleagues and, although he/she might enjoy the exchanges, the preference will always go to the solitary work.

4. Research results and their relevance for organizational sustainability and innovation

Viewed as a system, every organization needs a variety of work styles interacting with each other in order to create an environment where innovative ideas come to life and become specific reliable products or services. This is why there is no “right work style” for a specific organization or even for a specific organizational objective. Still, some of the organizational climate dimensions as well as some work style traits may be more relevant for creating and developing a sustainable organizational environment that fosters innovation. Flexibility and creativity as work style factors as well as management and organizational support represent such relevant variables.

Creativity is influenced by work experience (t(58)=2,00 p=0,04<0,05). Employees with a larger work experience tend to be less creative, to prefer a more traditional approach of problems and to employ well tested solutions to the professional problems they encounter. This is the result of routine and energy saving working strategies. Already tested problem-solving solutions become professional skills and habits, requiring less energy for higher efficiency. On the other hand, less experienced employees, who are still learning oriented employ higher creativity and test a diverse range of solutions, even though this requires a trial and error process. Therefore, a company that values innovation must employ strategies aimed at developing employees creativity and reducing routine while using their experience in new and diverse contexts.

The analysis of the research data found that there are significant differences between subjects who score high on management as organizational climate factor and the ones who score low at the same measure regarding the following set of work style factors: work involvement (t(58)=2,09 p<0,05), management abilities (t(58)=2,91 p<0,01) and competitiveness (t(58)=2,03 p<0,05). Subjects who perceive a high efficient management in their organization score higher in all three above mentioned work style factors, which suggests that an efficient management promotes the management related dimensions of employees’ work style. Therefore a management oriented toward sustainability will encourage the employees to develop a set of skills and attitudes that contribute to a work style that promotes the same sustainable objectives.
The data analysis has revealed a significant set of differences between subjects who perceive a high level of organizational support and the others regarding creativity as a stable work style factor \((t(58)=-2.79\ p<0.01)\). This result emphasized the role of organizational support as a protective and encouraging framework for creative attitudes in the workplace. This kind of results comes to support the interconnection between work style and organizational climate in favoring innovation at organizational level.

The analysis of organizational climate presents multiple benefits for both the organization as a whole and for its management especially when it comes to identifying the causes, the aggravating factors and the solutions for internal conflicts. A better knowledge of the organization climate is essential for change management. Given the fact that organizational innovation represents one main factors supporting organizational change, it is highly important to explore both concepts in their interaction.

5. Conclusions

Analyzing and developing an organizational climate that fosters different work styles and promotes innovation is not only sound human resources practice, but also the development of social research closely connected to a innovation as organizational change promoter. Considering the fact that creating and developing an efficient, positive and open organizational climate represents an incentive for productivity and innovation, it is reasonable to consider that the analysis of different means to optimize and consolidate organizational climate contributes to the development of scientific strategies that foster creativity and innovation at both individual and organizational level.

By promoting and facilitating high quality professional and informal them relationships among workgroups, the development of an open organizational climate contributes to creating the organizational framework for generating and implementing new ideas for sustainability in the context of accelerated social economical transformations that define our society.

The formative dimension of work style and organizational climate management contributes significantly to creating a working environment that fosters the development of employees’ new skills and behaviors leading to increased productivity and to employing innovative approaches of work tasks.

The continuous personal training and the development of long term educational strategies based on solid interdisciplinary research represent the only consistent human resources focused way as promoting sustainability and innovation at both individual and organizational level.

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