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Soft competencies in sustainable development

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ABSTRACT

Constant development and improvements of the way in which organizations operate as well as the unstable and turbulent environment cause that organizations have to revise their management practices. In the past management was usually perceived from the perspective of four functions, which comprised: planning, organizing, managing and controlling. Nowadays, one can notice that new functions in this respect have appeared which are directly linked to psychology. They concern such activities as inspiring the environment, creating the friendly work environment or delegating rights. Soft competences, such as communicativeness or easiness of making friends, are more and more frequently skills which employees are expected to possess. A very important aspect of employee selection process is examining the level of soft competences they possess. This also constitutes a very important factor of a successful management process in organizations

Keywords: management, soft skills, soft competence, sustainable development, organization

1. INTRODUCTION

Undoubtedly, a very effective way of developing soft competences is organizing trainings in this scope. This method makes it possible to implement attitudes and values. Trainings also increase the awareness of employees of both higher and lower level. Currently, employees are not constrained by one place or kind of performed work, the revolution in the IT area has made it possible to work from any place in the world. However, in majority of cases it is still the economic factor that plays the most important role in satisfying individual

needs of employees. Nevertheless enterprises which apply sustainable management principles in their operational activity built their human resources on the basis of beliefs and the enterprise value. In this way they become coherent with the beliefs and values of their employees, which results in their market success. Improving their qualifications and competences by means of employee trainings causes that the results of their work are used by the employers in the most effective way and the employees feel necessary, rewarded and professionally fulfilled (Witaszek 2011, p. 303-322).

The goal of the paper is to analyze the soft competences in the context of sustainable development. Competences are understood as the whole of skills, knowledge and experience that employees possess. They are typically divided into the hard and soft ones. The hard ones are defined as the specific, measurable features, which are confirmed by reliable documents. These features include driving licenses, computer skills, language skills. This type of competences is often referred to as base competences which are required to render work at a given work post (e.g. knowledge of a foreign language, a driving license). They can be measured with the use of a zero-one system. Soft competences in turn concern social and sociological skills (Czakoń, 2011, p. 12-24).

2. SOFT COMPETENCES

The word “competency” stalked up on the unwary working in the human resources field. The catalyst for its use was Boyatzis's (1982) book *The Competent Manager*. He triggered the popularity of the term which became *de rigueur* for the serious consultant in the late 1980s (Woodruffe, 1993, .29 – 36)

Soft competences are the ones which are associated with psychophysical features and social skills and the primary focus of them is human behaviour, attitudes and lifestyle. They concern in particular managing ourselves, our motivation and interpersonal skills. Some of the examples include:

- Communicativeness
- Operational dynamism
- Creativity
- Ability to be a team member
- Time management
- Resistance to stress

Soft competences are frequently included into the group of qualifications which are desirable not only in case of candidates for managerial posts, in the field of consultancy or sales, but also in case of professions such as engineers, IT personnel or even accountants or auditors. This can be treated as evidence that soft competences belong to the group of so called transferrable competences, which are indispensable for effective functioning in various professions. Possessing these competences makes it much easier to change the career, acquiring new professional skills finding a new job, and what is particularly important they facilitate adaptation to new professions, new responsibilities and professional tasks. Thus, it can be stated that it is an important task of organizations to try and combine efficient functioning of employee roles with the level of possessed by them soft competences.

Contrary to popular expectations soft competences can be practiced and developed. However, the nature of such a process is more difficult and more complex than in case of hard ones. However, one can search for information on courses in trainings in this respect. Participation in such events can largely influence the work we have to undertake in case if we want to change something in our personality. There are courses held which allow their participants to improve their personality traits such as motivation or assertiveness.

Primary focus of behavioral competences is on the conduct of behaviour or in other words they refer to the person's personality, resources and the possibility of generating behaviours which are perceived as essential and adequate in fulfilling a specific professional role. In order to evaluate competences of a given person one has to observe this person's actions in various situations and contexts (Whiddett, Hollyforde, 2003, p. 19-34).

The importance of soft competences

Both hard and soft competences have a large impact on our work efficiency and its quality. One can state that we are useful as long as the qualities we possess belong to both of these groups. Key competences identified for each work post will be different. For instance, a candidate who applies for the post of a driver does not have to be fluent in foreign languages, but the basic requirement to be fulfilled in such a situation is having the right qualification, a driving license is indispensable to perform this type of job.

Unfortunately, the situation on the contemporary labour market does not reflect the one which used to be dominant in the past. Nowadays employees have to be much more flexible with reference to their job requirements and understand that during the whole period of their professional activeness they can be subject to frequent changes in order to meet the demands of unpredictable work environment. Therefore, it is important to be aware of the fact that the modern times requirement is the invest in ourselves. Contemporary employees have to use the time and possibilities of development in order to build a competitive advantage (Dyjecińska, Smółka 2006, p. 95-101).

Soft competences of key employees constitute a key element which conditions development of organizations. Also the implementation of sustainable development principles in management is crucial from the point of view of soft competences (Aronson, Wilson, Akert., *Psychologia społeczna. Serce i umysł*, 1997, p. 97-100). Development of discussed competences is important element in contemporary organizations management. Thanks to it, employees feel that they constitute a part of the organization and understand and approve their roles regardless of the fact how important their organizational roles are. The goal of the contemporary enterprise is not only to strive at achieving a financial success, nowadays it is equally important for organizations to apply sustainable development principles in their actual operational activity

Competences and leadership

Soft competencies determine that differences exist between competencies needed by managers and leaders. Of the competencies deemed essential, 86% were soft competencies. Between functional work areas. The results indicate that programs should stress teaching hospitality students soft competencies in favor of hard competencies. (Sisson, Adams, 2013) When making an attempt to identify the qualities that constitute a perfect leader one would probably mention the following personality traits:

a) self-esteem - this is a feeling of one's uniqueness, possessing an individual way of life as well as feeling strong and powerful; those who appreciate their own value and have high self-esteem treat other people with due respect and perceive their value. Obviously, it can be stated that this is a quality that everybody should possess, but it is also particularly desirable in case of leaders;

b) proactivity - which means being responsible for one's one life and not trying to put the blame on faith for all hardship and problems that happen to us. This also means undertaking new ventures and being aware that we are architects of our own future and nobody but ourselves are blain for the failure. There are a lot of people who live being convinced that it is not possible to change the routine of their lives. They do not try to change anything about the present circumstances as they believe that it will not produce any positive results. In contrast, a proactive behaviour means the one where individuals take over the control and begin to act effectively,

c) independence - this is the personality trait which is acquired by individuals in the course of gaining experience and becoming mature; independent individuals think in the categories of "me" and strive for independence and taking over the control; an interdependence often occurs in a well-functioning enterprise - the employees constitute a network of individuals bound by responsibilities and profits;

d) positive thinking - is an ability that allows individuals to perceive the reality and the future in an optimistic way; this is a particularly important feature for leaders as if they tend to see the reality and future in the gloomy colours their employees start to copy their attitude; this in turn can lead to a situation when quality of employee work decreases and they cease to believe in the success of the company; the leader should bring enthusiasm in people and talk to them in such a manner that convinces them to make attempts,

e) internal coherence - is a kind of honesty that consists in harmony of what is said, thought and done; true leaders always speak their mind, do not manipulate people, keep their promises and do not take in possession property they do not own,

f) feeling of abundance - a belief that there is enough of the goods of this world for everybody; it is a necessary element of teamwork and not only leaders need to possess it; leaders need to believe that everything is possible and can be achieved so they should create long-term visions to purse,

g) ability to create visions - true leaders have two visions: the first one concerns their lives and the second one relates to the development of business they are in charge of; they should allow themselves to have dreams and try to encourage people to share their dreams,

h) ability and will of constant learning,

i) intuition - finding out the truth without use of logical thinking,

An ideal leader embodied almost all of the abovementioned qualities and knows how to make use of them in private and professional life inspiring other people to follow them (Ciesielska 2007, s.38-44).

The article presents the correlation area of implementing sustainable management principles in enterprises with reference to the classification of trainings in the scope of soft competences. It has been written on the basis of Authors' own experience of many years in the

scope of soft competences trainings for enterprises and observations of the changes undergoing as a consequence of these trainings.

Awareness of entrepreneurs and sustainable development

The level of knowledge on sustainable development in the society is growing and the concept has become very popular. However, it is still doubtful whether the level of social awareness of people is satisfactory to start to implement the concept in organizations.

In the contemporary world the scope and rate of sustainable development principles implementation do not keep up with unfavourable phenomena, examples of which are exceeding the tolerance limits of the nature and accumulation of social problems. It is necessary to transform consumer societies into sustainable ones, based on responsible production and consumption". One can observe that profit-driven attitude is still dominant among the entrepreneurs, although the number of sustainable development proponents is still growing. Also the growing disparities between enterprises with respect to sustainable development principles implementation cause that tolerance limits of the ecosystem are still being extended and the number of social problems is still increasing. Thus, it seems reasonable that in order to prevent the further accumulation of problems the present economic system needs to be altered, as it is based on the growing consumption of materials, fuels and promoting consumer lifestyle. The priorities to follow for entrepreneurs are definitely a high level of integration with the ecosystem, pro-environmental awareness of the society as well as the managerial staff that is competent and consistent in the way it manages the enterprise. Enterprises of the future have to consider limitations of the ecosystem and social needs. As a consequence they should take into consideration priorities of sustainable development in, among others, the following areas: production management, marketing, management, reporting and communication with stakeholders, relationships with clients and social responsibility, relationships with suppliers and contractors, strategic management and sustainable planning (Bukowski 2009, p. 11-34).

It should be also emphasized that considering the sustainable development principles sets new challenges for the managerial staff. Only well-qualified managerial staff of contemporary enterprises, particularly the ones of production profile, can face the challenge of trying to combine the current development of the enterprise and preserving its sustainability (Adamczyk, Nitkiewicz 2007, p.27).

3. SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT AREAS

Corporate social responsibility is therefore gaining significance in the business world. Since solving corporate social responsibility issues is not a routine job, every challenge in corporate social responsibility requires its own approach; and management competencies are crucial for designing appropriate approaches towards the realization of sustainable solutions. (Wesselink, Blok, van Leur, Lans, Dentoni 2015)

Sustainable management determines application of its priorities in the areas such as: management, marketing, production, reporting and communication with stakeholders, relationships with clients, relationships with suppliers and contractors, strategic management and sustainable planning

Soft competences in the enterprise.

The goal of soft competences in the enterprise is to teach entrepreneurs, management staff and employees how to behave in situations which require having particular personal skills. They extend and complement the range of behaviours, techniques and skills in particular areas. They are also applied in enterprise management, relationships with clients and contractors, recruitment processes and also in interpersonal relationships of employees (Borys 2011, p. 75-78).

Experts conducting trainings for enterprises on the basis of their observations in this respect confirm a significant impact of trainings on enterprise development, in the area of communication and sales as well as a better integration of employees within the enterprise. Therefore, managerial staff trainings constitute an essential element of the process of implementing sustainable development principles as they result in improved level of the skills of lower and higher level managerial staff. Development of soft competences and managerial competences among the members of management staff results in acquiring by them skills such as: setting the plans to be carried out, both short-term and long-term ones, and also ambitious but at the same time realistic sales plans. Managerial trainings improve the ability of time management and team management, which are vital elements of successful functioning of the enterprise and simultaneously very positively influence employees. Communication trainings for managers directly influence their ability to listen and understand the needs of co-workers and subordinates, build mutual trust and have a positive influence on building the authority of supervisors (Pindór 2011, p. 186-196).

Another type of conducted in enterprises trainings are the ones that aim to develop sales skills of employees. They can result in a significant improvement of ecological products sales efficiency, which are produced in an environmentally- friendly way and based on "clean production" as well as the ones that are recyclable. Clean production, according to the international definition included in the Cleaner Production Declaration, is "constant application of an integrated, preventive strategy with relation to processes, products and services in order to gain environmental, economic and social benefits as well as ones referring to health and security" (A. Lulewicz, Rafał Miłaszewski 2005 p. 157).

One of the key types of trainings that influence effective implementation of sustainable development principles are the ones in the scope of communication. Effective communication makes flow of information among the departments smooth, both in vertical and horizontal dimension. This is the type of trainings that facilitates building skillfully relationships with clients, contractors and co-workers (Makles 2011, p. 38-43).

Another important type of trainings are the ones in the scope of recruitment. They also have a vital influence on implementing the sustainable management in organizations. This type of trainings increase the awareness of employers as to the values represented by the candidates and they also influence largely final choices of recruiters. A vital factor for implementing sustainable management is skillful recruitment of employees sharing pro-environmental views and high level of soft competences condition the course of selection procedures. Organization leaders are more willing to employ creative persons who are resistant to stress and assertive, possess the self-motivating ability and can plan their tasks efficiently and are consistent in implementing them (Wawrzyniak 1999, p. 9-14).

The last type of trainings that have significant influence on implementing the sustainable development principles in enterprises are synergy trainings. They fulfill an important role and rising the awareness of employees in the scope of their value and meaning

to the enterprise. They realize that their responsibilities are of great importance to the successful operations of the enterprise (Allen., Haslam-Hopwood 2005, p. 38-43).

The goal of this training is to extract new levels of energy, motivation, integrating the group or team of workers and also motivate the individuals to be more creative and productive (Ludwiczynski 2000, p. 34-46).

The following classification of management areas has been applied in the conceptual conclusion planning, organizing, employment, leadership, control (Ghillyer, 2009, p. 7).

The literature on the subject includes various classifications such as:

Planning, organizing, influencing, control (Pabian 2011, p. 9-8).

Planning, organizing, leadership, control (Pabian, Arnold. 2013, p. 3-8).

Table 1 below determines directions and selection of training types in particular management areas.

Table 1. Directions and selection of trainings in particular management areas.

Management areas	Training types
Planning	For managerial staff, soft competences, communication, synergy
Organizing	For managerial staff, recruitment, soft competences
Employment	Recruitment, communication, soft competences, sales
Leadership	For managerial staff, soft competences, communication, synergy, sales,
Control	For managerial staff, soft competences, synergy,

Source: own elaboration

Competences

- personal competences - qualities such as knowledge, abilities, skills, personality and experience of a given person,

- corporate competences - belonging to the organization, included into the processes undergoing within the company, a permanent feature of the corporate system,
- corporate competences remain in the company even if the employees leave it,
- soft competences - personality traits, personality, personal skills, conduct of behaviour and communication,
- hard competences - our specific abilities, so called hard ones (Amstrong, 2000, p .42-49).

4. SUMMARY

Civilization progress and the changes undergoing in the turbulent environment have influenced relaxation of basic management rules and implementation of psychological aspects stressed by soft competences such as: communicativeness, making friends easily, which surely conditions the probability of company's success regardless of the form of its operations.

Trainings have vital influence on the process of shaping employees in the scope of their proper attitudes and meeting particular qualification requirements depending on the place occupied in the given organization's hierarchy.

Soft competences can be developed, the vital element in this respect is the awareness of the need to make such an investment. Key competences are the key for securing correct development of organizations. Types of trainings can be adjusted to the needs of a particular enterprise or the ability to integrate a group or team of employees in order to increase their motivation to perform their duties and organization's mission.

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