ETHICAL HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT
A KEY TO COMPANY SUCCESS

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Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to characterize the key elements of human resource management that affect employees' perception of the organization as an ethical company that cares about them in a comprehensive way. Due to the very wide spectrum of the mentioned factors, their selection was made on the basis of interviews with both full-time and part-time students with work experience, who indicated those factors that matter most to them.

Design/methodology/approach: The goal was achieved through literature analysis and conducted interviews with full-time and part-time students who have taken up professional work.

Findings: Based on an analysis of the responses of full-time and part-time students and a review of the literature, it can be concluded that the most important factors in ethical management are communication and motivation, while the tool supporting the entire process is a code of ethics.

Practical implications: The elements indicated in the study can guide leaders on what to pay attention to when creating the pillars of ethical management.

Originality/value: To identify the challenges faced by today's leaders in the field of ethical management and the guidelines that will help in their implementation.

Keywords: ethical manager, ethical motivation, ethical communication, code of ethics.

Category of the paper: Literature review/ research paper.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, in an era of tremendous competition in the market and the associated need for companies to provide services at a very high level, it is becoming extremely important not only to attract, but also to retain highly qualified employees who are identified with the organization. High salaries, however, seem insufficient to accomplish this, so other, more effective and long-lasting solutions are needed.

One of them is undoubtedly an ethical approach to the employee, which is manifested in an attempt to understand their needs and expectations, create a rewarding, differentiated incentive system, (based on knowledge sharing) (Vuori, Okkonen, 2012) or communication,

(Bean, 2001), which is based on mutual respect. As A. Kuzior points out, „in the workplace the instrumental relationships supervisor-employee and employee-employee do not build a positive atmosphere of cooperation and reciprocity" (Kuzior, 2021, p. 73) but the key may be empathy and comprehensive support, given to the employee in any situation.

Of course, one can look at the problem in a more formalized way, creating codes of ethics (Lemon, Boman, 2022), which is a document that represents a kind of commitment to ethical standards not only by managers, but also by their subordinates.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper will be to attempt to characterize the key elements of human resource management that affect employees' perception of the organization as an ethical company that cares about them in a comprehensive way. Due to the very wide spectrum of the mentioned factors, their selection was made on the basis of interviews with both full-time and part-time students who have taken up professional work, who indicated those factors that matter most to them. The following is a characterization of the most frequent responses and also introduces the key concept - namely, the ethical manager.

2. Ethical manager

The literature on the subject describes the concept of an ethical manager very broadly. Namely, he wants to "simultaneously run a profitable business and act ethically" (Ciekanowski, Szymański, Załoga, 2018, p. 96). As A. Szejniuk points out, "the task of an ethical manager is to apply management methods and techniques through which efficiency can be increased. He should mobilize employees to achieve certain results while adhering to norms, rules and procedures" (Szejniuk, 2016, p. 93). J. Szczupaczyński on the other hand, believes that "an ethical manager is not ethical in order to achieve business goals more effectively - he is effective because he is ethical" (Szczupaczyński, 2011, p. 181). It is worth adding that „leaders must combine strategic vision, transactional and transformational elements, and servant and empathic leadership" (Kuzior, Zozuľak, Balahurovska, 2023, p. 308).

It is important that the manager is aligned with the company's culture and values. Therefore, special importance should be attached to the leadership recruitment process.

An interesting proposal in this regard is presented by J. Tokar and K. Oleksa-Marewska. The authors developed a model consisting of three stages. Stage one is a diagnosis of the organization's culture in four dimensions (mission, cohesion, commitment and adaptability), using a tool for this purpose - Denison Organizational Culture Survey®. This allows the organization to identify the area that needs special focus from the organization's leaders, so as to strengthen the culture. This knowledge should guide the actions of recruited leaders in the first place. The aforementioned activities require specific competencies that a recruited leader should possess (Tokar, Oleksa-Marewska, 2021). Stage two is based on the selection of

key leadership competencies that meet the needs of an organization with a given culture dimension. The four dimensions of culture mentioned in the first stage, in order to remain in a relative state of balance, require differentiated leadership competencies (Tokar, Oleksa-Marewska, 2021). As the authors note, "D. Denison matched three competencies to each dimension, which, although they may be assessed at different levels, will co-occur together to form a leadership profile" (Tokar, Oleksa-Marewska, 2021, p. 113). Accordingly, the authors suggested that one of the four catalogues of competencies should be selected for the selection process, so that the recruiter can focus on diagnosing the most necessary of them. Moreover, the selection of each catalogue depends on the result of the organizational culture survey (it is required that the leader focus his efforts on the dimension in which the results are the lowest) (Tokar, Oleksa-Marewska, 2021). The final stage, focuses on the diagnosis of leadership competencies during the selection process and the final selection of the candidate (Tokar, Oleksa-Marewska, 2021). It is worth noting that "the catalogue of competencies assigned to the dimension to which the recruited leader will have to pay particular attention should be the starting point for developing the profile of the candidate being sought" (Tokar, Oleksa-Marewska, 2021, p. 113).

Given the range of challenges facing today's leaders, they should be highly versatile, open to new challenges and resistant to stress. Coordinating activities requires not only good work organization, but also the ability to delegate tasks to employees (Ugoani, 2020) according to their qualifications and preferences. Extremely important in subordinate-supervisor cooperation is empathy, but central to the entire management process is emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is "a set of abilities relating to emotions" (Côté, 2014, p. 459). It is also defined as "the ability to properly understand emotions, express them and evaluate them; the ability to manage emotions and also the ability to motivate" (Szaban, 2012, p. 139). It is worth noting its dimensions, which include self-awareness (i.e. recognition of one's own emotions, or a sense of confidence in one's potential), self-control (among other things, adherence to ethical norms), social awareness (which includes the ability to recognize the needs and emotional states of other people), or social skills in a broad sense (Goleman, 1999; Kozłowski, 2023). If a manager has a high level of emotional intelligence then he will certainly be predestined to be an ethical leader. However, the starting point is to reach level one first, because the key to understanding others is to understand oneself.

It is worth asking at this point, what kind of leadership style should an ethical manager choose in order to positively influence his colleagues and motivate them to accomplish the most complex and challenging tasks? Certainly, it should be tailored to the situation facing the supervisor. Among the many detailed in the literature of leadership styles, the modern manager, according to the author of this paper, can use the following approaches to employees (Tokar, 2015; Kanarski, 2005; Cardona, Garcia-Lombardia, 2008):

- personal style (the leader expects initiative from colleagues, encourages their participation, comforts them and gives them support),
- democratic style (the leader involves employees in solving problems, actively listens and provides explanations),
- impoverished style (the leader allows employees to take responsibility and encourages new challenges),
- autocratic style (the leader expects others to be enthusiastic about work, provides assistance and also is in constant contact with co-workers).

An element of support is evident in each of the above styles, which is of great importance in creating relationships based on mutual respect and trust.

3. Ethical motivation of employees

One of the key elements of ethical human resource management is employee motivation. As J. Ugoani points out, "motivational leadership entails stimulating people's imagination and inspiring them to move in the desired direction" (Ugoani, 2015, p. 585). Furthermore, "an effective manager can influence the personnel he manages in such a way that the achievement of the organization's goals satisfies the needs of each participant in the process" (Kuzior, Balahurovska, 2022, p. 174).

In many organizations, there is a widespread belief that motivation is related to the mutual respect that managers and employees show each other (Jalloh Abdul, Jalloh Alhaji, 2016). Incentive system, in turn, is "the methods of influencing employees' motivation reflected in organizational procedures, which are usually open and universal, that is, addressed to people who meet certain formal conditions-not discretionary actions, carried out by specific individuals and addressed to individuals" (Woźniak, 2012, p. 21).

Experts in the literature on the subject point to values that are key in the process of motivating an employee, as they improve commitment and behaviour that promote organizational efficiency (Kozłowski, 2023).

The first of these is the aforementioned respect. This value includes "acceptance of race, colour, ancestry, gender, diversity of beliefs, behaviour, communicating with dignity with the employee, adjusting working hours in relation to the employee's personal circumstances, honouring commitments, respecting the time of others, respecting standards and accepted customs, or creating a safe work environment for all" (Kozłowski, 2023, p. 88).

Another value is integrity, that is: "keeping one's word, performing tasks reliably, being responsible to the organization and other co-workers, being paid decently for one's work, being paid extra for extra work, following health and safety rules, not exposing an employee to health risks, following standards in promotion and appraisal processes, being loyal to the

organization, to superiors, following ethical principles both in relation to co-workers and customers" (Kozłowski, 2023, p. 88).

The third, but no less important value, justice, "refers to the equal treatment of all employees both in terms of wages and workload, rewards, awards, decorations, equal treatment without distinction based on gender, race, origin or religion. This value is particularly important in pay and bonus and promotion systems. The point of reference for employees can be other employees or companies of a similar nature" (Kozłowski, 2023, p. 88).

It is worth noting that these values are complementary, complementary to each other. To emphasize their importance, they can be included in the organization's code of ethics, which will be discussed later in this paper.

Analysing the topic of ethical motivation, it is worth noting the recommendations for leaders, regarding the building of intrinsic motivation. Here R. Mrówka draws attention to the following points (Mrówka, 2010):

- leaders should strive to ensure that employees know the organizational vision and goals. Moreover, employees should identify with said goals. It is also worth making the most of their skills, which will undoubtedly increase the importance of the work they do,
- it is important to provide employees with an appropriate level of autonomy when performing their duties, which will increase their sense of responsibility,
- employees should be informed about their achievements in a clear and objective manner, based on reliable criteria,
- during delegating tasks, it is necessary to take into account first of all the qualifications and skills of the employees, as well as inspire self-confidence in them,
- organizations should ensure employees' basic needs are met, including fair remuneration, job security, and a positive working atmosphere,
- importance should be given to the selection of employees willing to grow.

This guidance can be an important signpost for leaders beginning to create motivational systems in the organization, providing a strong foundation for sustainable, ethical motivation.

At this point, it is worth mentioning key forms of ethical, intangible motivation prioritized by today's employees. One of them is the concept of work-life balance (Sirgy, Lee, 218), priority especially for the generation Z. „According to its assumptions, employees behave in a certain way to meet the needs for balance in the workplace. Once the goal is achieved, they will be more satisfied with their jobs and thus more motivated" (Nieżurawska-Zając, 2023, p. 49). „Elements of this concept include: workplace flexibility, health and beauty, cultural initiatives and community engagement" (Nieżurawska-Zając, 2023, p. 49). Another form is referred to as the so-called psychological contract (Thomas, Au, Ravlin, 2023). According to B. Kożusznik „the concept of psychological contract best captures the mutual psychological relationship between the employee and the organization. The relationship is complex, and the psychological contract reflects a set of unwritten mutual expectations between the employee

and the organization" (Kożusznik, 2011, p. 43). Thus, for example, the employer undertakes to provide the employee with decent working conditions and the employee in return will perform the work with a high degree of commitment and a sense of responsibility for the task at hand. Employee participation is also an important form of motivation (Moriarty, 2010) related to their participation in the life of the organization (for example, in the decision-making process). According to A. Pocztowski „participation, treated as an integral part of human resource management, is aimed at supporting the two main goals in this area of company management, that is, to provide employed employees with better opportunities to develop their potential capabilities and to strengthen their commitment to the company" (Pocztowski, 2003, p. 432). When analysing forms of intangible, ethical motivation, one should not forget about equal access to innovative courses and training tailored to the needs and expectations of employees.

4. Ethical communication

Another extremely important factor in ethical human resource management is communication (Morreale, Spitzberg, Barge, 2023), both internal and external (Ober, 2022), (also in the context of digitalization) (Meng. Kim, Reber, 2021). As J. Tokar and K. Oleksa-Marewska point out „today, social media and available remote working systems are displacing traditional emails, providing more opportunities to effectively coordinate team activities. It is becoming important to learn the tools and understand the nature of the digital medium, and the very form and content of the message have a colossal impact on building relationships based on trust" (Tokar, Oleksa-Marewska, 2021, p. 93). Of course, one should not forget the traditional form of communication, which is particularly important for today's employees, especially in the context of delegating tasks or rational, constructive criticism. Its rules are detailed by B. Kozyra. And so according to the author the employer (Kozyra, 2019) should:
- have such a conversation with the employee in person, immediately after the inappropriate behaviour occurs,
- judge the behaviour and not the person,
- start the meeting properly, by explaining the precise purpose of the meeting, specifying the consequences of the mistake made,
- show respect to the interlocutor, speak with tact and sensitivity,
- praise the person being criticized for the good results of their work so far,
- asked for a proposal to correct the error and also provide support to the employee in this regard.

If these rules are met, certainly the relationship between the employee and the employer and the employer not only will not deteriorate, but on the contrary - the level of trust of the employee in the supervisor and the entire organization will increase. Also influential in building

a bond between the sender and receiver of a message is the ability to listen. "This process should not be limited to the analysis of verbal messages, as it is necessary to catch such symptoms of emotional reactions that make understanding more insightful and accurate. In the process of listening, empathy, the ability to understand the interlocutor's feelings and motives, is crucial" (Ostrowska, 218, pp. 104-105).

5. Ethical codes

The codes of ethics (Messikomer, Cirka, 2010; Payne et al., 2020) mentioned in the study are a very important element in supporting ethical management.

B. Suchodolski emphasizes that „the code of ethics is a set of principles and values that should guide the members of a given group in the performance of official tasks in the workplace and beyond. The provisions collected in the code are intended to set high ethical standards applied by members of the group and thus take care of the good name of both them and the group as a whole" (Suchodolski, 2012, p. 159). W. Kozłowski, on the other hand, clarifies this concept by referring to the leadership code, or "a set of ethical and professional rules that managers should follow. Adherence to the code guarantees a good reputation and a good life" (Kozłowski, 2023, p. 119).

Codes have both supporters and opponents. Supporters emphasize that its provisions represent a commitment to ethical principles in the organization, while opponents criticize it as a tool for imposing rigid behavioural standards on employees. In the opinion of the author of the study, it is undoubtedly an important document that is a point of reference in contentious issues or during the occurrence of ethical dilemmas in the organization.

6. Influence of ethical attitude of managers on employee behaviour

The above-described elements of ethical human resource management have a direct impact on ethical behaviour of employees. According to the interviews, they firstly create the identification of employees with the organization, their sense of loyalty to their employers and the related desire to stay with the company for a longer period of time, despite various crises. Secondly, they shape positive, mutually cooperative and trusting relationships on the supervisor-subordinate line and in the team of employees. Third, they integrate the team, and a set of consistent values in the form of a code of ethics provides a point of reference in contentious issues. Therefore, it is worthwhile to manage ethically, as this leads to the acquisition of valuable, dedicated employees who have a sense of mission and pursue the organization's goals with commitment and efficiency.

7. Challenges facing today's managers in ethical Human Resources Management

Although ethical awareness (Koumbiadis, 2014) of managers are getting higher and higher, it is undeniable that, due to the dynamically changing environment, they have to face new challenges in management based on ethical norms and values. One of them is to build a stable organizational culture in the organization (Graham et al., 2022) encouraging new tasks, based on an atmosphere of cooperation and trust with which employees identify. Of course, it is important to select, already at the stage of the selection process, such employees whose value system is consistent with the system that the organization professed. An important part of adapting a new employee to the culture can be the adaptation process (Kunasegaran et al., 2016), in which the mentor, introducing the employee to two dimensions (organizational and social), introduces its basic principles.

Another challenge related to globalization is the ethical management of cultural diversity (Podsiadlowski et al., 2013), consisting in building an effective multicultural team that will carry out ambitious tasks, using its huge potential. Of course, the key to this is acceptance, tolerance, breaking stereotypical way of thinking and counteracting potential practices that discriminate against employees. In order to achieve this, the culture days could be organized in the organization that illustrate what customs prevail in a given country. Another solution is connected with joining nationwide programs promoting ethical management of cultural diversity.

Another significant challenge is the introduction of a trust management strategy at all levels of the company's operation. As J. Paliszkiewicz emphasizes, "trust plays a very important role in an organization, because it concerns the most fundamental issues: credibility, intentions, competence, ethics of conduct, truth, faith in another person. Any deviation from these canons, instrumental treatment of employees, suppliers, business partners or customers will sooner or later be discovered" (Paliszkiewicz, 2013, p. 57). This can be achieved by providing employees with autonomy in performing various tasks or by wide-scale staff participation in making important decisions for the organization.

8. Conclusions

Ethical management (Snellman, 2015) is finding more and more supporters. Modern leaders are aware that only such an attitude will gain the approval of employees and make them fully identify with the goals of the organization, staying in it for a longer period of time. Of course, this approach requires a lot of effort, because some elements require continuous development

and adaptation to current trends. The above study indicates three main elements of the discussed strategy: ethical communication, motivation and a code of ethics, which is an instrument supporting the entire process. Of course, managers have a much wider range of tools at their disposal in this area, but the factors indicated in this article should be the basis on which this approach will be based.

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