SELECTED ASPECTS OF SUSTAINABLE HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AS PERCEIVED BY MANAGERS

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Purpose: The purpose of this article is to explore managers' views on their role in shaping the impact of Sustainable Human Resource Management (SHRM) on personnel risk, with a particular focus on the importance of the psychological contract.

Design/methodology/approach: The study is based on qualitative in-depth interviews conducted among a group of 35 managers from various industries and sectors, including IT, finance, higher education.

Findings: The results indicate diverse approaches to the implementation of SHRM practices in the context of personnel risk mitigation. Managers emphasized their special role in promoting organizational stability and long-term development of human resources through their awareness and competence. The analysis revealed the significant impact of the psychological contract on building trust in teams, fostering innovation, and minimizing employee risks.

Research limitations/implications: The study is limited by its qualitative nature and the specific sample of 35 managers, which may not be representative of all industries and sectors.

Practical implications: The data obtained from this study can be used to design effective solutions for SHRM, taking into account both the factors conducive to the implementation of the psychological contract and the multifaceted determinants of personnel risk. The findings highlight the importance of managerial awareness and competence in promoting organizational stability and long-term development of human resources.

Social implications: The research underscores the importance of the psychological contract in building trust within teams and fostering innovation, which can have a positive impact on organizational culture and employee well-being.

Originality/value: This paper provides new insights into the role of managers in shaping the impact of SHRM on personnel risk, with a particular focus on the psychological contract. It contributes to the existing literature by highlighting the diverse approaches to SHRM practices and their implications for personnel risk mitigation.

Keywords: Sustainable Human Resource Management (SHRM), psychological contract, personnel risk, human resource management practices, managerial awareness, employee engagement, professional development, organizational stability, employee retention, operational efficiency.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

Human resource management in the knowledge economy requires practices that combine economic, social and environmental objectives (Chams, García-Blandón, 2019; Macke, Genari, 2019). Sustainable human resource management (SHRM) contributes to the simultaneous improvement of corporate performance and employee well-being, which fosters sustainable competitive advantage (Amrutha, Geetha, 2020). At the same time, managing personnel risks, such as excessive turnover or declining employee engagement, remains a challenge (Bochniarz, Gugala, 2005; Sjöberg, 2003).

Although there is a growing body of analysis pointing to the positive impact of HRM on mitigating personnel risks, the perspective of managers implementing these assumptions in daily practice is still under-researched (Liang et al., 2024). To date, the focus has mainly been on theoretical concepts and quantitative performance indicators (Cohen et al., 2012; Macke, Genari, 2019), leaving out a thorough analysis of decision-making determinants and organizational culture. In response to this gap, it was assumed that the degree of knowledge and understanding of HRM principles among managers has a significant impact on the long-term health of the company, including employment stability, competence development and the level of employee engagement (Macke, Genari, 2019; Liang et al., 2024).

The purpose of the article is therefore:

1. Determine the degree of awareness of managers with regard to the key principles and goals of sustainable HRM.
2. Examine how managers understand and incorporate personnel risk into team management (Sjöberg, 2003; Barrera-Animas et al., 2017).
3. Identifying key challenges and barriers to implementing sustainable HRM practices from a managerial perspective (Barrera-Animas et al., 2017).

The analysis was based on qualitative research, involving in-depth interviews with managers at various levels, representing companies of varying sizes and business characteristics. This approach allows us to look at attitudes and beliefs in a way that would not be possible using quantitative methods alone (Chams, García-Blandón, 2019). It makes it possible to understand how leaders define HR risks and what actions they take to minimize them while balancing financial goals and responsibility to employees (Macke, Genari, 2019; Obłój, 2020). Empirical analysis reveals both factors that favor the integration of HRM into practice and barriers that hinder the implementation of the concept (Tannenbaum, Salas, 2020). The following sections of the paper present research findings and recommendations for practitioners and researchers interested in implementing a sustainable approach in human resource management.

2. Theoretical background

Sustainable human resource management (SHRM) combines business, social and environmental objectives, which in practice can translate into reducing personnel risks associated with excessive turnover, loss of knowledge or declining commitment (Macke, Genari, 2019; Chams, García-Blandón, 2019). The psychological contract, defined as an informal set of mutual expectations and commitments between employee and employer, plays a special role in this process (Rousseau, 1995). Violation of these rules can lead to a weakening of trust, increased turnover and destabilization of the team (Bochniarz, Gugala, 2005), while maintaining them - supported by transparent communication and equal treatment - strengthens employee motivation (Rogozińska-Pawełczyk, Wiktorowicz, 2023).

In periods of crisis or with sudden market changes, HRM can help a company not only survive difficult times, but also use them to build a long-term competitive advantage (Obłój, 2020; Mohiuddin et al., 2022). Openly informing the team about the condition of the company, jointly developing development plans and promoting cooperation based on shared values strengthen the organizational culture, while stabilizing relationships between employees. This approach reduces personnel risks associated with, for example, inconsistent goals or insufficient communication.

Actions that foster trust within the team, clearly define tasks and create conditions conducive to dialogue promote the strengthening of the psychological contract (Rousseau, 1995). This makes employee relations more predictable and resistant to crisis situations. Collaborative problem-solving, systematic review of findings, and consistent fulfillment of promises create an environment in which financial success coexists with a sense of security for employees (Macke, Genari, 2019; Barrera-Animas et al., 2017). Managers guided by this understanding of HRM can reduce the risk of conflict and loss of commitment, while creating more sustainable, motivated teams.

3. Research Methodology

The study was conducted using qualitative in-depth interviews (IDI), which allowed for an in-depth examination of the complex relationships in the areas of Sustainable Human Resource Management (SHRM), personnel risk and the psychological contract (Flick, 2018; Maxwell, 2013). The IDI method is adequate for capturing managers' individual beliefs and experiences, which often cannot be fully recorded in quantitative surveys. Based on a literature review (Bryman, 2012) and a pilot study, a questionnaire with 17 questions was developed, and the interviewer could ask additional in-depth questions (Silverman, 2013). The research

was conducted from June to August 2023 (an average of one hour per interview), purposively selecting managers with diverse HR experience and representing a range of industries, from microenterprises to large companies (Frankfort-Nachmias, Nachmias, 2001). Such a sample does not guarantee representativeness, but it does provide comprehensive insight into adaptation practices and strategies, providing a basis for possible further quantitative research (Barrera-Animas, Leal-Rodríguez, Alonso-Cruz, 2017). The collected interviews were transcribed and then subjected to open coding, allowing key concepts and issues to emerge. In the next step, the codes were grouped into thematic areas (e.g., HRM, personnel risk, psychological contract), and then the results were interpreted from the perspective of the research objective. This made it possible to capture recurring patterns, as well as the nuances of the organizational context, which allowed a better understanding of how managers perceive the interrelationships between the factors analyzed.

Table 1.
Structure of the study group n = 35

Category	Subcategory	Number of managers	Percentage
Company size	Large companies	14	50%
	Small and micro businesses	12	40%
	Medium-sized companies	9	10%
Industry	IT	10	35%
	Finance	8	25%
	Higher education	7	15%
	Training and development	10	25%
Seniority	Under 5 years	10	35%
	6 to 10 years	13	30%
	Over 11 years old	12	35%

Source: Own study.

The survey included 35 managers from various sectors (IT, finance, training and development, higher education), working in companies ranging in size from small businesses to large corporations. This captured a broad spectrum of practices and the impact of various organizational contexts on the implementation of HRM and HR risk management. Although the results are not representative, they provide valuable insights for further academic research in this area.

4. Applications

In the first part of the study, the authors focused on how respondents understand Sustainable Human Resource Management (SHRM) and whether the stated definitions actually translate into concrete actions in organizations. The analysis showed a clear variation in the interpretation of SHM: 37% of respondents focused mainly on environmental and CSR practices, while 55%

pointed to a holistic approach, combining economic aspects with concern for the mental and physical well-being of team members. In large corporations, managers surveyed described extensive programs (including comprehensive training, environmental projects), the effectiveness of which was often monitored using KPIs (key performance indicators). In small and medium-sized companies, on the other hand, initiatives took a more informal form, focused on local, day-to-day needs, such as flexible working hours or reducing resource consumption. Nearly 60% of respondents appreciate an organizational culture that is open to employee activity and initiative, seeing this as an opportunity to increase innovation and reduce personnel risk. The most frequently cited measures (65%) were various forms of support for well-being and work-life balance, while 42% pointed to mentoring and coaching programs to develop individual competencies. In addition, 45% of managers mentioned cooperation with psychologists, 50% mentioned remote work, and 38% mentioned organic practices to support flexibility in team functioning. Table 2 takes a closer look at examples of managers' statements, illustrating the diversity of approaches to HRM.

Table 2.
Quotes from interviews on the area of Sustainable Human Resource Management (SHRM)

Question	Quote	Interpretation
How do you understand the concept of Sustainable Human Resources Management?	"For me, it's just being eco, meaning taking care of the environment in the office and things like that. Well, and they bought me a hybrid car now"	CSR
	"It means for me taking care of people so that they are not overtired and that they have time for themselves and their family. And, you know, if someone is demotivated or something goes wrong, for example, I know we can send them to these coaching sessions with you"	Employee well-being
What specific measures related to Sustainable Human Resources Management have been implemented in your organization?	"In our case, there is a remote working option and additional vacation days for people who need more time for themselves"	CSR / Welfare
	"We have a 'Green Office' program, where we try to use as little paper and energy as possible"	CSR

Source: Own study.

The second area analyzed in the survey was the concept of personnel risk, understood as the probability of adverse employee or organizational events. Analysis of the interviews revealed that 65% of managers associated it mainly with employee turnover, insufficient competence or professional burnout, while 31% also perceived the risk of internal conflicts and neglect of duties. All respondents (100%) considered them important to the stability of the organization, but pointed to the lack of consistent tools to mitigate these risks. In prevention strategies, 29% of managers rely on incentive systems (bonuses, raises), 42% emphasize the importance of development and education, and 17% point to succession of key positions. In addition, 26% pay attention to regular feedback, and 22% see coaching as an effective way to bind employees to the company in the long term. While 61% consider systematic risk monitoring very important, 34% count on the initiative of the HR department or management, which in

practice leads to intuitive responses to problems. The examples of statements summarized in the table show that the lack of formal procedures results mainly in ad hoc actions, which confirms the need to develop tools for identifying and assessing risks in the area of HRM.

Table 3.
Quotes from interviews regarding the HR risk area

Question	Quote	Interpretation
How do you understand the concept of Personnel Risk?	"Personnel risk is mainly turnover. People leave and then they have to be replaced, which generates costs and slows down projects"	Employee turnover
	"For me, it's mainly a lack of skills in the team. If we don't have the right people, the quality of work goes down"	Lack of qualifications
	"It's burnout. When someone gets burned out, it's not just them that suffers, it's the whole team, and that affects efficiency"	Professional burnout
	"Personal risk is also conflicts in the team. If they don't get along, the work goes like hell and the atmosphere is bad"	Internal conflicts
How to minimize the impact of risk? What impact does it have on teams and organizations?	"Raises and bonuses so that people stay with us. It works because employee turnover is lower"	Incentive systems
	"Training and courses to improve skills. This is important because then we have fewer problems with the quality of work"	Education and competence development
	"We have an anti-stress program and psychological support for employees. This helps, because we see fewer cases of burnout"	Psychological support
	"We organized communication workshops to reduce conflicts in the team. This is crucial, because conflicts affect efficiency"	Conflict management
Do you think personnel risk should be monitored?	"Yes, without monitoring personnel risks it is impossible to manage the team effectively"	Risk monitoring
	"No, I think it's too invasive and can negatively affect team morale. Besides, I don't even know how I would do it, it's too complex and not very practical"	Lack of monitoring
	It seems so, but we don't have any systems to do it, I often do it on what I call "feeling". I know that someone wants to leave well then I report it to HRBP.	No monitoring

Source: Own elaboration based on the authors' research.

Some respondents (31%) pointed to retaining key employees through individualized incentive programs, financial rewards and salary increases. Others (27%) stressed the importance of early recognition of symptoms of burnout, which allowed to minimize its negative impact on the work of the team. Some managers (18%) emphasized the implementation of extensive training programs to foster competence development and improve cultural cohesion within teams. Some respondents (24%) also pointed to the effectiveness of coaching conversations and sessions with a psychologist, recognizing them as innovative tools to reduce risks arising from imperfections in human nature or stressors.

In terms of the psychological contract, the majority of managers (56%) considered loyalty and trust to be key elements of mutual, unspoken agreements between employee and employer, stressing that their violation leads to a deterioration in productivity or an increase in turnover. Few respondents (14%) equated the psychological contract with clearly communicated commitments in the areas of career development and fringe benefits. In doing so, many respondents (42%) indicated that the interpretation of the psychological contract depends largely on career stage, corporate culture and individual generational preferences. They also noted (19%) that in a remote work environment, expectations for availability and productivity are sometimes unclear, which can make it difficult to maintain consistent rules for mutual exchange. Several managers (11%) additionally pointed to the risk of human resource manipulation in situations where the psychological contract is not clearly understood and respected. According to the respondents, generational diversity further complicates the uniform definition of mutual expectations, which in some cases leads to tensions within the team and hinders effective cooperation. Selected quotes from managers are included in Table 4.

Table 4.
Quotes from interviews regarding the psychological contract area

Question	Quote	Interpretation
What is your understanding of the term "psychological contract"?	"It's some unwritten rules. It is known what is expected of whom, although no one says it"	Unspoken contract
Have you noticed the positive effects of a fulfilled psychological contract on the functioning of the organization?	"If everyone sticks to these rules, the atmosphere is great"	Team atmosphere
	"When everyone knows what's going on, and it's generally fun, then the work goes as smoothly as possible, then I don't even have to get very involved somehow, because they take the initiative themselves and help each other"	Productivity
Have you noticed any negative effects of an unfulfilled psychological contract on the functioning of the organization?	"There are times when we see something is not quite ok, that's when gossip and misunderstandings start"	Misunderstandings
	"When we spin something we don't stick to, then people start to leave or they do things on the spur of the moment"	Fluctuation

Source: Own study.

Responding to a question about employees' expectations of their employer, managers indicated a wide variety of needs and priorities. In addition to the financial aspect (salary, additional benefits), 38% of respondents noted the importance of work-life balance, and 26% emphasized the priority of career development and clearly defined promotion paths. At the same time, 41% of respondents emphasized the role of an organizational culture that fosters cooperation and mutual support. Many managers (44%) considered communication to be crucial in fulfilling their stated commitments to employees. They pointed to the need for

regular one-on-one conversations and ongoing feedback. For 33% of respondents, the most important thing was the consistent fulfillment of the demands expressed by employees, which they believe translates into higher levels of commitment, motivation and better business results. Respondents (29%) also noted the challenges of having to flexibly adapt to the rapidly changing needs of the team, especially in the context of implementing new technologies or organizational restructuring. According to 22% of managers, effective management of expectations requires first and foremost an accurate identification of their nature, followed by a quick and adequate response to emerging needs.

5. Discussion

The results show a variety of approaches to Sustainable Human Resource Management (SHRM). Some managers place special emphasis on environmentally friendly measures and corporate social responsibility (Amrutha, 2020; Chams, 2019), while others emphasize employee well-being and strengthening team relationships (Macke, 2019; Ghitulescu, 2013). These discrepancies suggest that HRM does not function as a uniform model, but rather as a set of flexible solutions that reflect both organizational priorities and the culture of a given company. Both larger and smaller entities may reach for different strategies: some limit themselves to short-term solutions (e.g., reducing current competency gaps), while others implement a long-term perspective, linked to training programs and succession planning, as Brown (2014) and Barrera-Animas (2017) point out. The lack of formal monitoring mechanisms can lead to unforeseen financial losses and reputational damage, especially in the context of costly recruitment and deployment of new employees (Tannenbaum, 2020; Gołębowski, 2015). Of particular note is the psychological contract (Rousseau, 1995), which, in a situation of imprecisely defined expectations, is sometimes a source of conflict and increased turnover (De Cuyper et al., 2014). At the same time, clearly defining and expressing this contract contributes to strengthening mutual trust (Rogozińska-Pawełczyk, 2018). On the other hand, actively involving employees in setting the rules of cooperation (Cohen, 2012; Liang, 2024) can significantly reduce the risk of unexpected departures and improve the quality of internal communication, and as a result, have a positive impact on financial stability and human capital development. In practice, larger companies tend to have more sophisticated tools, such as KPIs, to identify risks early, while smaller companies, despite greater flexibility, are less likely to formulate long-term plans. It should be noted that while the data collected allows for interesting conclusions, the sampling may have been limited to selected sectors and specific types of companies. In addition, the focus on the managers' perspective may not fully reflect the expectations and needs of lower-level employees. Despite these limitations, the work makes an important practical contribution, pointing out the need to introduce or develop

HR risk monitoring instruments (e.g., systematic analysis of HR data) and emphasizing the importance of consciously defining mutual expectations transparently within a psychological contract. HR leaders can use these findings to better align policies and procedures, especially in the context of financial and image challenges resulting from turnover and low staff engagement. From a theory development perspective, the findings presented here confirm the importance of organizational context in shaping HRM interpretations and approaches to HR risk. The size of the company, its affluence, as well as the organizational culture or leadership style shape both the definition of economic, social and environmental goals and the practical ways of achieving them. Further research could cover a wider range of industries and positions, and incorporate quantitative methods to verify the magnitude and regularity of the discrepancies observed. An important direction would also be to investigate the extent to which diverse forms of work organization - from hybrid solutions to international teams - affect the consistent application of HRM practices and the management of the psychological contract.

6. Conclusions

The study confirms the need to further develop and standardize Sustainable Human Resources Management in management practice, while shaping methods for monitoring personnel risk. The analysis presented demonstrates the importance of the role of managers in shaping the impact of Sustainable Human Resource Management (SHRM) on personnel risk. Managers increasingly understand that SHRM goes beyond environmental issues to include employee well-being, organizational effectiveness and social responsibility. Special attention should be paid to the importance of the psychological contract, which influences trust, commitment and stability in the employer-employee relationship. Neglecting mutual expectations and commitments can lead to an increase in personnel risks, such as job burnout and excessive turnover. Effective management of these risks requires the conscious building of a psychological contract through transparent communication, clear development goals and activities that support work-life balance. An integrated approach to HRM that takes into account the psychological contract and HR risk management is therefore the foundation for an organization's long-term success and its ability to create value in a sustainable manner.

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