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SUSTAINABLE HRM. THE TEN CRITERIA FOR AN EFFECTIVE SUSTAINABLE HRM.

PROF. EM. ALEX VANDERSTRAETEN

UNIVERSITEIT GENT

E-MAIL: Alex.Vanderstraeten@ugent.be

www.alexconsultancy.be

1. Introduction

Sustainable HRM is more and more a hot topic in HRM. A recent literature study (2021)¹ shows that Sustainable HRM has regularly appeared in HRM-related scientific publications (both magazines and books) since 2014. Since 2017, we have even seen a huge increase in the number of scientific publications on this theme. This means that the academic world is strongly interested in sustainability itself, but also in the possible role of HRM in the sustainability debate. The scientific debate has not stopped since then. In addition, we also note that HR Managers are increasingly interested in the possibilities of Sustainable HRM for the organization.

Based on these developments we can more or less describe the features and concrete elaboration of Sustainable HRM. Sustainable HRM is presented using simple models, such as the well-known 3 P model from Elkington. Other models have been followed and have further developed the basic idea of Sustainable HRM. What is essential, however, is that HRM evolves from a strategic partner into a sustainability partner by firstly paying explicit attention to achieving sustainable results in the short and long term, secondly by paying attention to the well-being of employees in the short and long term, and thirdly, by explicitly embedding HRM in both the realization of 'green' interests and the realization of societal impact.

This ambition extends beyond the classic (strategic) HRM approaches by explicitly referring to employee well-being, ecological and climatological aspects, and social impact regarding human rights. HRM is the designated actor within the organization to initiate and guide sustainable initiatives, especially in the field of well-being within and outside the organization.

Hence the importance of clearly defining Sustainable HRM, so that the consequences for organizations are clearly established. We do this on the basis of ten Sustainable HRM criteria, which gives Sustainable HRM a concrete face within the organization and makes it possible to develop a fully-fledged Sustainable HRM policy for the organization.

¹ Text based on Kramar Robin & Vanderstraeten Alex, Sustainable HRM. From theory to practice. Gent, OWL Press, 2021.

2. Strategic thinking and action in the short and long term

Since HRM has become a determining part of the supporting management tasks (finance, logistics and infrastructure, ICT, personnel and administration) within an organization, the role and importance of HRM has continued to increase the last decades. The time when the personnel manager took on a purely executive and administrative support role is long behind us. We notice this development in practice and in the role of the HR Manager. In 80% and even more of the organizations, he or she is actually a member of the highest management body such as the executive committee, management team, or other decision-making body. He or she has evolved from purely supportive to a co-decision maker in the organization.

In combination with this, both in literature and in practice, HRM has been further developed into a strategic decision maker, the manager who thinks in the long term and acts in function of long-term developments of personnel and organization. The importance of a long-term orientation is generally recognized in the scientific literature as an essential characteristic of Sustainable HRM.

In general, a long-term focus is relevant to lead an organization to long-term success. Thinking about the future means that an organization takes both the short and long term into account. Short-term success does not automatically lead to the long-term viability of an organization. Therefore, when developing Sustainable HRM, we must find a balance between long-term and short-term success.

This means that Sustainable HRM is only sustainable when these considerations are made and both short- and long-term strategic objectives are formulated. In concrete terms, this means, for example, that short-term profits are limited in favor of long-term investments. Making profit in a company in the short term therefore does not meet the requirement of strategic thinking and action in the short and long term of Sustainable HRM. But social profit and public organizations also have to think in the long-term, and for example think beyond the period of a political legislature.

Especially in people management, a long-term perspective is necessary, as HRM practices need some time to contribute to successful organizational performance. People evolve slowly, changes occur slowly. Sometimes managers expect positive results after several months of changes in the field of organizational change, or for example after intensive development projects for employees. This is wishful thinking, an illusion to think that effects can be achieved in the short term. Sometimes patience is needed to effectively observe the results of change and improvements in employees or in organizational cultures.

The need for high-potentials or a more committed workforce often serve as drivers for a long-term orientation, which refers to the sustainable attraction and retention of employees. Involved employees are committed to a sustainability culture and therefore share the same values. In terms of sustainability, the most valuable employees are those who identify themselves with the organization in the long term and promote its values to the outside world. As managers we dream of committed employees instead of docile employees, employees who take responsibility, think results-oriented and contribute constructively to the success of an organization.

But also in the domain of Planet we can adopt a long-term perspective that lead to sustainable Green HRM. Green HRM strategies can help the organization achieve its global green sustainability ambitions in the long term.

Firstly, we can look at the long-term development of a green mindset of employees, the belief in a sustainable transition to a green environment. We are not only thinking of green mobility such as public transport, electric company cars, or other concrete green initiatives, but also of a deeper development of a green corporate or organizational culture.

Secondly, in addition to green HRM, we consider the long-term social impact of an organization on its social and societal environment. Organizations are thus concerned with the realization of social, labor and human rights in the short and long term with a view to a more just and humane world.

HRM can help the organization to become a credible long-term partner for other social stakeholders in the areas of human development, politics, social welfare, cultural participation and/or the realization of more ethical values and standards (corporate governance). It is the ambition of Sustainable HRM to include human rights, ethics, reduction of inequality, and other general social issues in their long-term strategy.

How can we know whether an organization is developing both a short- and long-term perspective in its Sustainable HRM? Based on the following criteria:

- The organization has short and long term objectives in the areas of Performance (short and long term results, profit), People (physical, psychological and social well-being), and Planet (green and social outcomes).
- The organization has concrete measuring indicators for all objectives with which both outsiders and internal employees, executives and managers are aware of basic data and trends about the sustainable HRM policy.
- The organization continuously monitors the development of its short and long-term objectives, for example through representative dashboards.
- The organization evaluates its short- and long-term objectives in the field of sustainable HRM at least once a year.
- The organization clearly takes short and long-term objectives into account based on possible adjustments and improvements

3. Balancing explicit results in the areas of Performance, People and Planet

Sustainable HRM strives for a balanced approach in the three areas of Performance (Profit), People and Planet. This means that objectives and results are presented simultaneously in the three domains and that they are interdependent on each other.

For example, we know from research that positive human results, such as work involvement and well-being (People) lead to better results (Performance). Happy employees perform more and better. Despite this evidence, it is necessary to carefully examine this relationship and determine whether it works in all circumstances. A careful assessment is therefore necessary to draw careful conclusions about the mutual relationship between the three Ps.

A major difference with strategic HRM is that Sustainable HRM recognizes the tensions and possible contradictions between the three areas. In concrete terms, this means that short-term investments must be made in the field of well-being, which may lead to better results. Yet we are not sure about this relationship and we usually have to look at the long term to achieve the positive relationship between well-being (People) and results (Performance).

Studies have shown that when workforce reductions are used to improve short-term financial results, it often leads to negative human consequences such as overwork, stress, loss of confidence in management and lower job engagement. It also appears that the loss of committed and competent employees in the short term, who contribute to the organizational culture and the success of the organization, can have detrimental consequences in the longer term.

If we only focus on Performance, there is a great risk that we will lose out on the People domain. However, if both Performance and People are taken into account, there is a much smaller risk that the well-being of employees will suffer under the pressure of better or more results. Hence again the importance for HRM to focus on both Performance and People objectives and to avoid internal contradictions between the two. People objectives may cost some money to secure long-term results.

It is to the credit of organizations to explicitly advance People objectives in pursuit of a win-win solution that recognizes that achieving sustainable human objectives means investing in people rather than achieving immediate financial gains or short-term results. Balancing these outcomes in the short and longer term is typical of Sustainable HRM.

But the focus on Planet objectives can also lead to win-win situations for People and Performance objectives. Committed employees with a green mindset can help the organization move forward, not only in achieving sustainable results, but also as an example of an attractive employer, who is committed to the long term towards a sustainable environment and society.

In summary, Sustainable HRM means the recognition of the importance of the three Ps and their interdependence. This makes Sustainable HRM a more comprehensive and holistic approach to the management of employees and organizations.

How can we know whether an organization is working with a balanced approach to Performance, People and Planet in its Sustainable HRM? Based on the following criteria:

- The organization has strategic objectives in the three domains of Performance, People and Planet.
- The organization studies the short- and long-term effects of all objectives
- The organization actively searches for the internal consistency of objectives and effects (powerful connections, not deadly combinations) of the three Ps.
- The organization examines the mutual relationships between the three Ps to the extent that they reinforce each other.
- The organization eliminates negative effects and internal contradictions as much as possible

4. The development of personal, organizational and social capabilities

A central concern of Sustainable HRM is the development of human and social capital as an essential outcome of HRM practices. This development of human and social capital can take place at three levels: the personal or individual level, the organizational level and the societal level.

Sustainable HRM is primarily concerned with developing individuals within the organization with the aim of increasing their individual capabilities and employability. This is about guaranteeing the capabilities that the organization needs in the short and long term. These capabilities may already have been acquired by schools and universities, but organizations can further promote employee development through career planning, coaching and lifelong learning programs. The organization takes responsibility for the continuous development of the individual capabilities and personal growth of employees with a view to sustainable employability of employees.

Secondly, Sustainable HRM has an impact on the development of the organization, in the form of team development, knowledge management, the learning organization and overall the growth of the social skills and resilience of employees with a view to collaboration and the growth of social capital. This social growth is necessary to build resilient organizations that can meet the challenges of the future due to the ever-changing environment. The anchoring of social capital in the organization by promoting cooperation, consultation and internal communication is a task for Sustainable HRM.

Thirdly, Sustainable HRM bears responsibility for social development. People have the right to participate in society's increasing level of education. Capacity development of individuals is used as a measure of social well-being. This capabilities approach to well-being was initially developed by Nobel Prize winner Amartya Sen, who further developed the concept with American philosopher Martha Nussbaum. Rather than simply assessing the well-being of a population, the approach attempts to evaluate what an individual can do and be in different societies. It measures the opportunities given to each person individually. HRM professionals can contribute to this idea through HRM activities such as training, personal development and lifelong learning and general capacity development.

In this context, the OECD advocates cooperation with the ILO, the IMF and the World Bank for an approach that reflects the characteristics of Sustainable HRM for the development of capabilities and employability. In its report to the G20, it advocates the development of transferable skills, broader vocational profiles and competency-based learning. They call for greater dialogue between education and training institutions, stating: 'Employers should work with education and training institutions to ensure the provision of relevant skills, including through internships; provide on-the-job training to facilitate skills improvement and adaptation; and adopt forms of work organization that make the most of existing skills.' (OECD, ILO, World Bank & IMF (2016). Enhancing employability: report prepared for the G20 Employment Working Group. Paris: OECD)

Sustainable HRM and more specifically capacity development can contribute to achieving the universal Sustainable Development Goals and sustainability results by strengthening capacities that contribute to positive social outcomes such as good health, well-being, decent work and a more

ecological and humane society. In this sense, Sustainable HRM is a building block for bringing more happiness and capacity around the world.

How can we know whether an organization is working on the permanent and sustainable development of the employee, organization and society? Based on the following criteria:

- The organization has a clear vision and concrete objective regarding employee development (training plan, permanent learning system, learning platform, knowledge management, etc...)
- The organization has a separate section and budget for 'education, training, education, permanent learning, or development' in its financial accounting
- The organization spends at least 3-10% (depending on the sector) of the personnel costs on education, training or education
- The organization evaluates or monitors the competencies and growth of its employees
- The organization has a competency management system or learning system for both technical and generic behavioral competencies

5. Sustainable leadership as precondition for Sustainable HRM

HRM research continuously shows that the manager and supervisor behaviour plays a crucial role in the decision of the employee whether or not to leave the organization. Leadership is an important factor in employee's motivation and as such a determining element in the extent to which an employee feels good within the organization.

Sustainable HRM emphasizes authentic leadership, in which respect for the employee is central. Respect means, on the one hand, taking into account the human rights, labor rights and social rights of the employee, and on the other hand, respect in relation to the daily and informal interaction with the employee. The latter translates itself concretely into the oldest known rule in dealing with people, namely *'Treat people as you would like to be treated'*, as also formulated in the Bible, the Koran, or other historical documents. Respectful behavior is discussed again and again, creating a reciprocal relationship between people. If I act respectfully, there is a very good chance that this relationship will become reciprocal and that I will therefore also be treated respectfully by the other person. This develops sustainable interaction between people, and more concretely between, for example, manager and employee.

HRM literature continues to work on this by further investigating the manager-employee relationship. We have concluded that respectful internal communication, giving responsibility, giving employees development opportunities, working with objectives, and giving them a say are factors that increase employee motivation and lead to fruitful collaboration in the organization. This idea was already developed in the sixties by Herzberg (1968) when he asked himself the question how to motivate people. Leadership styles were later developed that elaborated on this, such as situational leadership (Hersey & Blanchard, 1972), transformational versus transactional leadership (Bass, 1985), Quinn's leadership model (2008) and many other models. In short, leadership and management is a crucial factor in the daily interaction with employees in an organization, and determines successful results.

The development of leadership models towards authentic, empathetic, participatory, democratic, strategic, visionary, etc. means that Sustainable HRM takes these insights into account. Sustainable HRM places particular emphasis on well-being-oriented, authentic and respectful leadership with an emphasis on respect for fundamental human rights, labor rights, children's rights, and social rights. In concrete terms, this means that organizations can draw inspiration from these insights to apply a professional form of management and leadership within their own organization, and thereby connect with Sustainable HRM.

How can we know whether an organization pays attention to leadership and management in the organization to install and improve a sustainable leadership system I function of Sustainable HRM? Based on the following criteria:

- An organizations has a leadership program to improve leadership styles of all managers and supervisors in the organization
- Organizations evaluate regularly their leaders and supervisors in terms of management and supervisors capabilities

- Organizations monitor leadership capabilities through individual feedback systems from employees and/or employee satisfaction surveys to take eventually improvement or corrective actions in terms of leadership
- Leadership and management is linked to ethical standards of good leadership, authentic leadership, participative and people oriented leadership
- Organizations take actions in cases of toxic leadership to avoid destructive practices of leaders, managers and supervisors

6. Paying attention to the positive and negative outcomes of HRM

A defining characteristic of Sustainable HRM is the explicit representation of both the positive and negative impact of HRM on the results that employees achieve in their well-being. Sustainable HRM requires that HRM managers evaluate the potential harm that HRM practices can cause to employees, and take actions to prevent and/or limit this damage.

HRM recognizes the positive results of HRM practices on productivity, job satisfaction, effort/engagement, reduced employee turnover, self-actualization and other positive effects on people and organizations. Nevertheless, attention must be paid to the negative effects of HRM practices such as stress, burn out, bad atmosphere between employees, etc. For example, by offering result-related bonuses, the stress level in the organization may increase, and employees are more likely to adopt a competitive attitude and instead of a co-operative one. These negative effects must be taken into account to determine the ultimate effect of the introduction of bonuses.

The fact that Sustainable HRM assumes a balanced approach (see above) means that HR Managers must pay attention to both positive and negative effects and weigh them against each other. This requires an advanced approach and possible calculation of all effects, and the consideration of these effects on the basis of concrete data (evidence-based HRM).

Measuring systems play an important role in making these assessments as concrete as possible. In concrete terms, this means, for example, that profit figures must be weighed against the costs of possible higher staff turnover or absenteeism due to illness (the staff costs of which can be calculated quite easily). A decrease in absenteeism, on the other hand, means that better (financial) results are achieved, in addition to the fact that the working atmosphere and other well-being indicators can also be positively influenced.

How can we know whether an organization effectively takes into account positive and negative effects of HRM systems and practices in the context of Sustainable HRM? Based on the following criteria:

- The organization has measurement systems for all HRM systems and practices that make it possible to analyze and weigh effects against each other
- The HR Manager or department analyzes and reports the effects of HRM for both employees and the organization
- The HR Manager eliminates the negative effects of certain HRM practices as much as possible

7. Sustainable HRM and employee well-being

Employee well-being naturally comes into its full elaboration in the People dimension of Sustainable HRM. Well-being is a broad concept, and is often identified with happiness at work, the 'Happiness Manager', the 'well-being manager' and other sometimes all-encompassing concepts.

In Sustainable HRM we therefore distinguish three levels of well-being, namely physical, psychological and social well-being. This makes the concept more concrete and therefore more measurable. This has the advantage that we more clearly define what we mean by happiness at work.

Physical well-being emphasizes physical health, made concrete by the absence of negative symptoms such as headaches, muscle pain, fatigue, vision problems, cardiovascular diseases, etc., but also absence of accidents and occupational diseases. This is the most concrete and institutionalized approach to well-being at work and is often the subject of social consultation between employer and employee in the context of (supra) national to local consultation systems. Physical well-being can also be characterized by the presence of positive feelings such as energy, zest for life and drive.

This is the health dimension of well-being that refers to objective physiological measures and subjective experiences of physical health. For example, it is measured by the absence of work stress, blood pressure, positive energy, minimum occupational accidents, occupational diseases, etc...

Employee psychological well-being has an affective character and refers to the self-proclaimed happiness of employees. This happiness-related well-being is therefore based on subjective experiences regarding performance at work. It is approached empirically with job satisfaction, affective commitment, personal motivation. Psychological well-being thus refers to the subjective experiences of individuals at work and includes employees' attitudes, such as involvement at or with work, sense of growth through work, self-realization, etc...

Psychological well-being is often measured based on employee satisfaction surveys to look for employees' subjective opinions about their psychological well-being. It can also be measured on the basis of objective measurements such as level of burn out, even staff turnover and absenteeism as a proxy of psychological well-being.

Social well-being finally focuses on social integration (feeling part of the community), social acceptance and inclusion (trusting other people) and empathy (understanding social processes and feelings). Social well-being focuses on the interaction between employees and the quality of these mutual relationships on the quality of life. Social well-being is reflected both in the extent to which we see ourselves as integrated (or conversely isolated) within a given community and in the extent to which we see ourselves as socially accepted. Furthermore, social well-being coincides with feelings of trust, support and reciprocity. Social well-being is expressed, for example, in aspects of collegial action, teamwork, and working atmosphere.

Sustainable HRM takes an integrated approach to employee well-being by recognizing well-being in both the non-work area (family, family, outside world) and the work area. This means the

integration of the work-life balance, and the recognition of the impossibility of completely separating work and private life. This means that the organization is concerned, to the extent possible, with the well-being of the employee within and outside the organization.

How can we know whether an organization is working sustainably on the well-being of its employees? Based on the following criteria:

- The organization has a clear vision and concrete objectives regarding well-being that focuses on physical, psychological and social well-being
- The organization has measurement systems that provide insight into the state of affairs and trends in physical, psychological and social well-being
- The organization has HRM systems with which it constantly pays attention to any welfare problems, such as an ombudsperson, prevention service, etc.
- The organization conducts a staff satisfaction survey at least every two years in which questions are asked about the physical, psychological and social well-being of employees
- The organization has a formal and/or informal consultation system between employer and employee in which safety, health and other welfare issues of the employees are central

8. Sustainable and green HRM

With regard to the environment, the concept of 'Green Human Resource Management' has emerged over the past ten years. Green HRM is part of Sustainable HRM that specifically focuses on ecological and climatic challenges.

Green HRM mainly wants to have an impact on the P for Planet. Green HRM is about more than taking environmentally friendly HRM initiatives such as reducing the ecological footprint of employees, promoting recycling at work, online training or energy-efficient office spaces. In concrete terms, this concerns a good waste management policy, CO2 compensation, adapting the working environment and the use of recyclable or recycled products, green mobility, or environmentally conscious remote working.

Green HRM states that policies can promote environmental sustainability through the design of green jobs, working with selection criteria related to environmental sustainability, training for efficient use of resources, performance indicators to support environmental sustainability and rewarding employees for green behavior. Green HRM states that it is necessary to improve the behavior, attitudes and capabilities of employees, motivate them to think green, and provide them with opportunities to build knowledge and skills related to environmental sustainability. The research into Green HRM makes a valuable contribution to Sustainable HRM if it is viewed in conjunction with working on the well-being of employees.

Research shows that young people nowadays choose a job within an environmentally conscious and green organization. HRM can be the driving force for a green mindset among employees that can position the organization as a green player on the labor market, thus contributing to a green corporate culture. In that sense, HRM is a green business partner for a green organization.

How can we know whether an organization is working on sustainable green HRM? Based on the following criteria:

- The organization has a green vision and explicitly uses green HRM objectives
- The organization has concrete measurement systems in which the state of affairs and trends regarding green objectives are monitored and evaluated
- The organization offers tax benefits for employees that lead to sustainable green mobility, and discourages the use of unsustainable mobility
- The organization has concrete initiatives in the field of waste management and recycling that influence employee behavior towards a green mindset
- The organization organizes education, training and education aimed at green behavioral changes
- The organization pays explicit attention to sustainable green initiatives in all its education, training and education initiatives

9. Sustainable HRM and the development of societal well-being

Sustainable HRM recognizes the role that HRM plays in developing social outcomes outside the organization. These include social health outcomes and the potential for creating social well-being. HRM policies such as wage and salary rates and training and education policies ultimately contribute to the distribution of wealth, income, knowledge and skills in society.

Societies with high income inequality appear to exhibit less trust between different economic groups in society, more political volatility, narrow networks of social relationships, social unrest, unequal access to educational opportunities, social reproduction of inequality and the potential for lower economic growth rates. Ideally, Sustainable HRM could contribute to minimizing these negative effects by working together with social institutions and by formulating its own social HRM policy, which is a reflection of higher social objectives such as greater equality and justice in society.

For example, an HRM policy, such as the remuneration and benefits policy, could be an example of reducing the large differences between high and low incomes for employees. This can be done by giving employees access to a share of the organization's profits or performance results. Southwest Airlines has a long history of involving employees with broad profit sharing, broad employee stock ownership and even, for years, broad-based stock options. This contributes to an employee-first culture and contributes to low employee turnover, business success, low customer complaints and employees who are proud to work for the airline.

The education, training and education policy for employees can contribute to greater employability of the same employees within, but also outside the organization. In this way, HRM and the organization contribute to the general development of individuals in society, knowing that education and training is a success factor towards increasing prosperity and well-being.

By realizing social impact, the credibility and legitimacy of the organization increases, because the latter contributes to the well-being of society and as such becomes a generally accepted institution in society. This increases the social responsibility of the organization, making the organization an example of social responsible entrepreneurship.

How can we know whether an organization is working sustainably on green HRM? Based on the following criteria:

- The organization has a vision and concrete objectives in the domain of Sustainable HRM that are in line with corporate social responsibility
- The organization invests in the personal growth and development of employees in order to increase the employability of those same employees, and takes the risk that employees will take advantage of the increased employability to leave the organization
- In Sustainable HRM, the organization explicitly pursues objectives and initiatives that have a social impact on the neighborhood, local communities, regional, national or even international environment
- The organization has a budget item in its financial accounting system that refers to HRM-related societal initiatives

10. Sustainable HRM and participation of all stakeholders

Sustainable HRM is related to political, social and cultural interests and their representatives. After all, the practice of HRM is a compromise between an organization's rational strategy on the one hand, and its internal and external interest groups on the other. People involved in the development and implementation of HRM policy operate in a context of conflicting pressures and conflicts of interest. Hence the need for a stakeholder approach within Sustainable HRM to identify these conflicting interests and take these interests into account as much as possible in achieving a sustainable HRM strategy for the organization.

Sustainable HRM explicitly recognizes that formulating and implementing HRM policies are complex processes, and that stakeholders such as employers, employees and trade unions can influence organizational decisions. In this sense, since World War II there has been a long tradition of institutional consultation in Europe between, for example, trade unions and employers (organizations) at organizational, regional, national, European and international levels. Sustainable HRM therefore takes this historical tradition into account and can even go further by organizing its own consultation and participation in addition to this institutional consultation in order to inform all stakeholders and, if necessary, have them participate in decision-making on important sustainable HRM objectives.

Strategy development indicates that a sustainable HRM approach requires HRM managers to involve key decision makers at board level and also in other functional areas. Sustainable HRM involves the integration of sustainability outcomes, including environmental outcomes, organizational strategy and HRM strategy. This requires consultation between all functional areas when formulating sustainable strategies.

In short, Sustainable HRM requires the involvement of both internal (employees, managers, executives) and external stakeholders (social interest groups, suppliers, environment, education).

How can we know whether an organization uses a stakeholder approach to Sustainable HRM? Based on the following criteria:

- The organization recognizes the right of existence of stakeholders (trade unions, employers' organizations, other interest representatives) in the organization
- The organization has regular and structured consultations with the most important stakeholders (managers, executives, employees, trade unions) in the organization
- The organization concludes binding agreements with stakeholders regarding sustainable HRM initiatives
- The organization regularly assesses the support for HRM systems and practices among its most important stakeholders.

11. Sustainable HRM based on explicit ethical values

Sustainable HRM underpins sustainability through explicit values that underlie sustainability. We can derive these values, for example, from the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). These values reflect a moral judgment about what actions and results are right or wrong and what ethical action means for the organization. Values provide the principles or standards of behavior about what is important and represent ideals against which it is possible to evaluate organizational actions and desired outcomes.

When SDG objectives drive the culture of an organization, it places itself in a socially broad ethical framework. Especially the sustainable goals around 'Good Health and Well-Being' (Objective 3), 'Quality Education' (Objective 4), 'Gender Equality' (Objective 5), Fair Work and Economic Growth (Objective 8), 'Reducing Inequality' (Objective 10) 'Partnership to achieve objectives' (Objective 17) appeal directly to the role of HRM within an organization.

The SDG's form a widely supported inspiration to underpin the ethical framework of Sustainable HRM. But other systems can also provide inspiration, such as the GRI (Global Reporting Initiative). The GRI Standards represent state of the art practices for publicly reporting on a range of economic, environmental and social impacts. Sustainability reporting based on the GRI standards provides information about the positive or negative contributions of an organization to sustainable development.

In addition, certain countries are characterized by cultural values that support sustainability and promote positive economic, social and environmental outcomes. Countries like Sweden and other Scandinavian countries have cultural values that shape government policies that contribute to these outcomes. These countries have low unemployment rates, balanced budgets and low government debt. They have also made a strong commitment to reducing inequality through extensive welfare spending, investing in human capital development through education, childcare and labor market policies, and implementing national policies to reduce gender inequality. At the same time, labor market institutions, such as trade unions and employers' associations, have been strongly developed to support social dialogue and maintain social peace.

Ethically based sustainable action can play a strengthening role in rolling out sustainable HRM systems and practices in the organization. It is necessary to ensure that actions are consistent with sustainable values. This consistency must be extended to all arrangements relating to own employees as well as subcontractors, people from across the supply chain, interim employees, etc.

How can we know whether an organization bases its sustainability on authentic ethical values. Based on the following criteria:

- The organization has an explicit value and standards system of Sustainable HRM as recorded in explicit documents (whether on the internet or not)
- The organization can clearly demonstrate the consistency between the sustainable values and standards on the one hand, and the concrete sustainable objectives and the daily actions derived from them on the other (walk your talk)
- The organization is inspired by generally accepted sustainable value systems such as the SDGs, GRI ... and the reporting and monitoring systems derived from them

- The organization translates its values and standards system into follow-up measurements and regularly assesses the perception of values within the organization by its employees

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