Employees' Readiness for a Career Shift

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Today's organizations are highly responsive to external changes, which they also demand from their employees. All employees need competencies to respond to Industry 4.0, the green business economy, and post-COVID-19 work circumstances and to manage sustainable careers. One way of doing so is to take active part in reskilling projects and be ready for a career shift, which researchers believe can be foreseen in people's devotion to sustainable careers and can ensure the sustainability of the whole reskilling project.

Keywords: sustainable career ; sustainable reskilling project ; readiness for a career shift

1. Introduction

The concept of sustainability in a business context has provoked core reinterpretations of the basic premises of work life, leading to the redesign of the role of the function of human resources management (HRM) in organizations. Bal and colleagues asked for sustainable HRM that "systematically respects, protects, and promotes the dignity and sustainability of all relevant living and non-living 'stakeholders' within and beyond organizations" [1]. In line with the characteristics of the sustainable HRM paradigm focusing on employees as one of the key stakeholders in viable businesses, the concept of the individual career is confined to new features of the psychological contract. Employees expect the concept of the individual career to be agile and flexible and not only include their job-specific competencies. Jobs have become broadly defined, less structured, and more ambiguous, bringing more arrays of responsibility while expecting the same from the workforce [2]. In contingent, uncertain environments, to respond to the complexities, changes, and challenges they bring, employees are supposed to be proactive [3] and integrate multiple perspectives [4], not only in the context of work but also regarding their careers. One of the sources and predispositions for acquiring this point of view is a growth mindset, in which one strives toward an experiential learning process [5]. Nevertheless, all these goals cannot be achieved without considering other stakeholders, employers, and HRM representatives, so one's sustainable career is seen as their "shared responsibility" [6] but also as a wider organizational and social system that includes organizations that deal with the training and development of employees, universities and other educational centers, the local community, and the state.

With the introduction of digitization in the work process and modern technologies to promote the green economy and development, and since the coronavirus pandemic, there have been increased initiatives and projects that arise with the idea that the development of the necessary competencies for the work environment is the joint responsibility of several stakeholders. Researchers will discuss the importance of reskilling projects, which are a popular global initiative. Reskilling refers to training individuals who have demonstrated the ability to learn new things and develop a new set of competencies with the aim of changing their careers and starting to work in entirely new roles. The need for reskilling is recognized by the European reskilling strategy [7] and the Reskilling Revolution, which is organized by World Economic Forum to develop new competencies for employees and help them find new jobs [8]. Researchers suggest that there is a need for reskilling projects in different fields of work [9]. However, the workforce must be ready to participate in reskilling projects to invest extra effort in developing necessary competencies and adapting to new jobs and working conditions. In many cases, the sustainability of reskilling projects depends precisely on the readiness of candidates to change their career and devote themselves fully to reskilling.

2. Sustainable Career

The idea of common-good HRM protects human needs for security, safety, and meaningful work [10], along with challenges with emphasizing individual accountability for personal and professional development, which are interwoven. Employees are steered toward not only embracing new practices in the organization but also developing a variety of skills that will make them competitive in the labor market. This competitiveness is incorporated into the concept of employability, which replaces the concept of employment as such. The concept of employability refers to the employee's "ability to

operate effectively within the labor market" [11] and "to gain initial employment, maintain employment, move between roles within the same organization, obtain new employment if required and (ideally) secure suitable and sufficient fulfilling work" [11]. It means that the employee must take responsibility for their own career and development, which is no longer the only means of earning a living but is also the process of optimally using one's own competencies both within the organization and beyond a single concrete employment setting [12]. It also goes beyond the context of work, encompassing the perspective of one's whole life, with the idea that career decisions should include an awareness of their effects on the roles one has in other life spheres [13].

From the organizational point of view, employees with sustainable careers ensure their organizations' resilience to threats to their current stability due to turnover potential. This is the challenge contemporary organizations must face in terms of continuing to be proactive in enabling employees to develop "under their roof". As organizations need to distinguish themselves through their organizational culture to endure external pressures, employees can also develop irreplaceable skills that would make them unique in the labor market. In this context, sustainability refers to a "competitive advantage based on capabilities that are valuable, rare and difficult to imitate and substitute for" [2]. The question remains as to what those skills are that are crucial for making one's career sustainable without jeopardizing the specific organization's goals or threatening overall sustainability. In addition to functional capacities, different authors emphasize distinct qualities and competencies, but there is some consensus about one's adaptability and flexibility, along with a capacity for learning and self-organizing [2], self-awareness and self-efficacy [14], the ability to embrace the long-term perspective, the "big picture", innovativeness, and a collaborative approach. Newman [15] was one of the first scholars to address the concept of a sustainable career, describing it as being flexible with restorative and integrative potential in a way that creates meaning to the person. In his conception, renewability is emphasized as the durability and the ability to recharge, and flexibility is defined as the potential to "bend without breaking" and to be resilient and confident, which is accomplished by continuous learning to face and anticipate changes. He also added integrity, as well as integration that aligns values and actions, producing a meaningful contribution. This overlaps with the concept of career competencies, which are seen as the reflective, communicative, and behavioral prerequisites for career development and predictors of perceived employability [16], and which are enriched by the meta-competency of being in learning mode [5].

Bal [1] argues that the meaning of a sustainable career is created in the background of wider sustainability discourse that implies the preservation of resources, equality, progress through innovation, and the integration of multiple stakeholders. Yet, for most employees today, having a self-directing career related to their sense of purpose is not achievable, so the authors argue that a sustainable career is an empty concept and more of a privilege than a situation the labor market allows. This ethical issue may be addressed with the concept of corporate social responsibility and the idea of not simply preserving some careers but, rather, improving social justice (which starts at the governmental level) and insisting on ethical behavior [17]. There are also pitfalls for those who have the benefit of identifying their career as sustainable. Those employees, who are self-reliant, are in danger of blaming themselves for not attaining the ultimate achievement criteria, which might lead them to burnout and experiencing failure [1].

Embracing sustainable career pathways allows employees to develop skills as valuable players in their team (achieving the organization's goals and improving its performance) and, at the same time, empowers them to be independent and self-sufficient. One aspect of career sustainability is the lasting alignment of personal needs and values with organizational interests [18]. The career itself is seen as a dynamic, continuous, cyclical self-regulatory learning process [14] in which each person actively participates by adjusting their work capacities, as well as their jobs, to keep them sustainable [12]. The person–career fit is always in progress and evolves over time, while the person gains deeper contextual and individual understanding by adapting and reshaping their perceptions of experiences and influencing their environment accordingly [14]. Briefly, a sustainable career is one that "enables being at least reasonably healthy, happy, and productive across the lifespan" [5]. Thus, indicators of achieved career sustainability, according to de Vos's model [14], are health (well-being), happiness (satisfaction), and productivity (performance, organizational citizenship behavior, and employability). The model also recognizes some personal, multilevel contextual (social space) and temporal aspects of careers. At the individual- and personal-level dimensions of sustainable careers are agency and meaning, which put the employee in charge and control of their own career in ways that they consider valuable. This should be performed by preserving and generating personal resources [4]. Finally, researchers have the concept of human sustainability [6]. Researchers have also found links between sustainable careers and the personality traits of neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness, as they influence the way people select, interpret, and react to life events [13]. So, it implies that, despite common characteristics, every sustainable career can also be described as idiosyncratic [6].

Reconciling the interests of all stakeholders, focusing on the common good, and overcoming the contradictions and paradoxes of contemporary existence are essential to sustainability. For an organization, this involves the need for trust

and empowerment of employees, and for individual employees, a sustainable career, as I see it, is one of personal maturity. Nevertheless, Bal [1] and colleagues are skeptical of integrity and the sustainability of the concept of sustainable careers, referring to it as if it is an idealized construction. While deconstructing and (de)ideologizing it, they try to provide alternative conceptualizations.

3. Importance of Reskilling Projects

Based on the responsibility of the wider ecosystem for the development of the working environment and employees, there are initiatives that can be singled out as the responsibility of several stakeholders, the state, industry, innovation centers, universities, and employees, such as reskilling projects. The need to reskill employees has recently arisen as a response to the needs of companies but also to the wider social context, to provide employees with a systematic way of developing competencies that are lacking in the market and in individual industries. Reskilling is an important topic in all areas of work, among younger and older workers, and among highly qualified and less-qualified workers in all countries. There is a lot of research that predicts a huge transition in competencies and occupations for millions of people around the world to meet the changing employment demands [19][20][21], which significantly affects the concept of a sustainable career. Students need to take part in reskilling and upskilling to prepare to be more creative for today's workplace [22][23][24]. Among employed workers, there is concern about the availability of key skills, and out of 71% of central executive officers (CEOs) who agreed with this, only 14% have made considerable progress in establishing an upskilling or reskilling program [25]. For example, it is estimated that 128 million adults in the European Union-28 (EU), Iceland, and Norway have low education, low-level skills, or medium education with a risk of skill loss and obsolescence [26].

Some of the reasons why there is now such a need for reskilling are the demands of Industry 4.0 and the presence of AI in all areas of work, the drive toward a green economy, and the consequences of COVID-19. Both AI technologies and the transformation of jobs since COVID-19 have brought more automation, data analysis, and application of technologies [27]. Whiting [28] suggests that the workforce needs reskilling in both the manufacturing and service firms to adopt Industry 4.0 principles. The EU Commission reported that two in five adults participate in learning every year in the EU, but there is still a gap regarding the needs of Industry 4.0 [29]. Green energy businesses are also rapidly changing the workplace environment. Mellett and Finnell [30] reported that the workforce in the solar area increased by 25% in 2016, and employment in the wind area increased by 32%, with new demands for competencies. There is a comparable situation in manufacturing and the supply chain industry, where digitalization has made changes such as the digitalization of products and services and new digital business models, which require a new set of competencies and workforce capabilities [9][31]. The workforce in banking and financial services has been introduced to technological advancement and changes to the way businesses operate based on digitalization, mobile banking, "Fintech" banks, and the automation of back-office operations [32][33]. For example, it is estimated that 20.8% of the workforce in the United Kingdom (UK) in the sector (229,000 workers) is at risk of displacement (PWC). Even for some management skills and competencies, for example, across the UK, by 2030, it is estimated that 5 million workers will be under-skilled or partially under-skilled in basic digital competencies [34].

In his work, Li [21] analyzed the need for reskilling in different countries and explained why reskilling is a global issue [21][35]. There is evidence about reskilling needs in Africa regarding adaptation to Industry 4.0 [36][37]. In Mexico, manufacturing companies are behind in technology; many jobs could be replaced, and workers need a new set of competencies [38]. Even in developed countries such as the UK, Norway, and China, there is a constant need for upskilling and reskilling the workforce, as well as more funding for universities and research institutes to train the workforce [39][40].

To have a sustainable reskilling project, it is essential that all stakeholders be included in co-creating value [41][42]. Depending on the area and competencies for which reskilling is carried out and the scope of participants in the project, the local government, employment agencies, enterprises, the broad range of education and training providers, employers, and employees should be included [43]. Also, environmental factors should be taken into consideration, supporting the participants' achievement in reskilling projects [44]. Three key actors in this context are industry, to explain skill needs; education, to respond to those needs; and government, to manage projects and bring actors together. Some challenges related to reskilling projects are as follows:

- Employees' readiness for a career shift: the readiness and willingness of the employee to change their career, to set aside time for reskilling, and to engage and dedicate themselves to developing a new set of competencies, which relates to their willingness to manage a sustainable career.

- The participation of adults in the need for upskilling and reskilling: those workers who need reskilling the most show the least initiative to participate in such projects; in terms of socio-demographic characteristics, this would include low-

skilled adults, older adults, and those living in rural areas [45].

- Reskilling opportunities in less-developed countries: based on the experiences of the Western Balkan countries, obstacles for people to participate in reskilling projects include financial resources, poor projects and training offers dealing with education and reskilling, the ability to coordinate training dates with working hours, and family reasons [46].

4. Readiness for a Career Shift

There are many initiatives around the world to reskill the workforce, to develop skills for the future, and to create a more sustainable workplace environment [7][8]. On the other hand, the workforce must be ready for life-long learning and investing extra effort in participating in reskilling projects and adapting to new jobs and working conditions. The sustainability and success of reskilling projects often depend on the workforce's readiness for a career shift.

Hirschi and Läge define career readiness as the "readiness of an individual to engage in the career decision-making process and make a mature career decision" [47]. In the case of young people, students, and juniors, this represents a readiness to plan a career, make the right decisions about career paths, continuously learn and develop skills, and be adaptive to changes in work demands and needs [48]. In the case of older employees, this includes the readiness to learn new things, develop completely new skills, change job positions, and adapt to different circumstances in the workplace. Many researchers have tried to determine what characteristics of an individual determine if they are ready to participate in a reskilling project. Some researchers have focused on personality traits and have tried to explain personal readiness for change, including passion, resourcefulness, optimism, adventurousness, confidence, tolerance [49], curiosity, persistence, flexibility, optimism, and risk taking [50]. Kužet and colleagues [51] used Cattel's 16PF model to examine the importance of reasoning, tough mindedness, self-control, independence, anxiety, and extraversion for success in reskilling projects. Otto [52] and colleagues analyzed the importance of the following characteristics: neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, conscientiousness, uncertainty tolerance, self-efficacy, strength of vocational goals, intent toward vocational training, and job satisfaction. Magnano and colleagues [53] used the Career Adapt-Abilities Scale-International form to assess Concern, Control, Curiosity and Confidence, and Transition Inventory, which measure the perception of the psychological resources that individuals need and use during a career transition. Ghos [54] and colleagues explain potential barriers during career transitions and the individual availability of psychological resources to effectively navigate them.

There is a certain problem that may occur when individuals decide to participate in reskilling projects. Duru [55] and colleagues classified career decision making into the following three clusters: (1) A lack of readiness before the career transition begins. This could be explained as a lack of readiness to explore opportunities on the market regarding training opportunities, reskilling projects, and new employment options. Sampson [25] and colleagues tried to measure variables contributing to low readiness, and these included "personal characteristics, acute and/or chronic negative thoughts and feelings, limited knowledge of self, options, and decision making, limited life experience, prior experience with career interventions, limited prior experience with career resources, inappropriate expectations about career choice and career services". (2) A lack of information. (3) Inconsistent information during the decision-making process.

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