'Keeper of the fire': human resource management’s role in the organisational development of an employee sustainability mindset

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Abstract: Sustainability is “meeting the needs and demands of today without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their requirements” [Burton, (1987), p.8] Sustainable development requires that organisations’ social, environmental, well-being, and economic factors are managed in balance and from short and long-term as well as external and internal perspectives organisations have been advised to yoke sustainability practice to virtually every facet of an organisation’s strategic management process, including human resource management as a functional level organisational strategic unit In recent years, human resource management (HRM) has been highlighted as a key agent with which to advance the firm because it is a central internal consultant for all matters of human capital management Thusly positioned, HRM can play a critical role in engendering employee sustainability practices. The purpose of this paper is to flesh out a key, core role for HRM as ‘keeper of the fire’ of an employee sustainability mindset Essentials of mindset are first developed, then the sustainability mindset and its integration into HRM and employee practices is explored Finally, critical concerns and future directions for sustainable HRM practice are examined.

Keywords: sustainable HRM; sustainability and society; sustainability mindset; mindset development and change; sustainable organisations; sustainable HR development; human capital management.


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1 Introduction

Over time, employees have become critical units of organisational mind and inimitable competitive advantage for firms (Bartlett and Ghosal, 2002; Mathur, 2015; Pfeffer, 1994). The function that exists fully for the support of employee distinction and contribution over time – human resource management – correspondingly has been gaining organisational recognition as business partner seated at the corporate executive table (Bahuguna et al., 2009; Christensen, 2006).

A cause that more and more in HRM agree should become central to HRM is sustainable human resource management, a discipline that is still at an embryonic stage (Aggerholm et al., 2011; Ehnert, 2006, 2009; Inyang et al., 2011; Lawler and Mohrman, 2014; Wehling et al., 2009; Wilkinson, 2005).

It is suggested here that HRM is uniquely positioned to be a key agent that ensures that the values of sustainability are disseminated organisation-wide and beyond and made integral to every HRM policy, procedure, program, and practice. This transition begins with a sustainability mindset. Thus, this paper will explore facets of mindset and how mindset is shaped. Then, the sustainability mindset itself is developed as a core facet of HRM. The favourable positioning of HRM to become a key steward of an employee sustainability mindset will then be discussed. Finally, specific implications of this central HRM positioning for managing employee cooperation in sustainability consciousness are discussed.

2 Mechanisms of mindset development and change

“Thoughts are behaviors we haven’t learned to observe yet” (B.F. Skinner).

Mindset is an established set of attitudes, assumptions, and methods held by one or more people or groups of people that is so established that it creates a powerful incentive within these people or groups to continue to adopt or accept prior behaviours, choices, or tools (Aronson et al., 2002; Dweck, 2007) Mindset is a mental inclination, tendency, or habit (Merriam-Webster) serving to shape outlook, understanding, behaviour, learning, and performance.

Accumulated findings from psychology, neuroscience, complexity, decision, and organisation development theory suggest that mindset forms as a function of habitual thoughts and corresponding imagery and emotions (Aronson et al., 2002; Bhanji and Beer, 2012; Hills, 2012; Schroder et al., 2014). Humans only view the world through mindsets. Once thoughts, images, and emotions become habitual, they then form neural networks that keep the mindset in place The mindset and its neural network continue developing and becoming stronger with repetition and practice (Bergland, 2012).
Therefore, the individual experience of resistance to change may be seen as the result of dense neural networks that have been straining to remain intact.

Mindsets may exist as slow changing mental dispositions that have been active for a considerable period of time, but they may also reflect fluid and fast-changing situations (Bergland, 2012; Begley, 2007; Doidge, 2007; Siegel, 2010). The mindset, either non-conscious or conscious and deliberate, can exert a profound influence upon life circumstances “A person’s mindset in any moment impacts their clarity of thinking, sense of strength and well-being, and ability to influence others” (Yeramyan, 2015). In fact, individuals are constrained to look at the world through the frame of mindset. This is the reason why mindset choices and shifts are so important to understand.

Mindset is shaped through key human resource facets such as vision, values, and beliefs that support the change, a strategic leadership that models appropriate speech and behaviour and acknowledges changed mindset-congruent speech and behaviour, a culture that is rich in image symbols, and language that evokes emotions supportive of a change (Sax, 2010).

A mindset that is resonated throughout an organisation in many and varied facets (e.g., a sustainability mindset) can serve as a vehicle through which an organisation can effect constructive, needed changes among its internal and external stakeholders (Ulrich and Lake, 1991). A mindset for sustainability, next turned to, focuses upon a firm’s values-based sustainability perspective and responding practices.

3 A sustainability mindset

“Waste not the smallest thing created, for grains of sand make mountains, and atoms an infinity” (Eric Knight).

For some time, sustainability has been ‘a big idea waiting to happen’ and is a current corporate mantra for the 21st century (Dyllick and Hockerts, 2002). Increasingly, business’s sustainability mindset is a necessary precursor to sustainable business (Savitz and Weber, 2006; Rimanoczy, 2013). However, sustainability is not just about matters nature and ecology. Economic, societal, and well-being resources are central and integral to sustainability, and are depicted in broader perspective in Figure 1. The sustainability compass (Steele, 2012), a unifying symbol for sustainability and core strategic tool, takes the English language directions – north, south, east, and west, and renames them mnemonically:

- **nature** – all of our natural ecological systems and environmental concerns, from ecosystem health and nature conservation, to resource use and waste
- **economy** incorporates the human systems that convert nature’s resources into food, shelter, ideas, technologies, industries, services, money, and jobs
- **societal** institutions embrace organisations, cultures, norms, and social conditions that make up our collective life as human beings
- **wellbeing** entails our individual health, happiness, and quality of life

A sustainability mindset in general is grounded in several core principles:
1. we cannot dig up from the earth at a rate faster than materials naturally return and replenish
2. we cannot make chemicals at a rate faster than it takes nature to break down
3. we cannot cause destruction to the planet at a rate faster than it takes to regrow
4. we cannot do things that cause others to be unable to fulfil their basic needs (Ekins et al., 2003).

These precepts translate to practices such as zero waste, use and reuse, and conservation, and are the essence of sustainability thinking and behaviour for firms as “caretakers of the earth” (Grant and Littlejohn, 2005).

Figure 1  Sustainability compass principles

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>NORTH</th>
<th>WEST</th>
<th>EAST</th>
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<tr>
<td>NATURE</td>
<td></td>
<td>ECONOMY</td>
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<tr>
<td>The nature principle:</td>
<td></td>
<td>The ‘economy’ principle:</td>
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<tr>
<td>The physical and biological limits of Earth's ecological systems must be respected.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Human societies, communities, and organizations need functioning economies to provide their needs and to support their aspirations.</td>
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<td>WELL-BEING</td>
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<tr>
<td>The ‘well-being’ principle:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Human beings have a right to be safe, to have access to healthcare, and to have the opportunity for self-expression, self-development, and a good quality of life.</td>
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This sustainability mindset as a way of thinking and being results from broad understanding of basic ecosystem principles and their manifestations (Steele, 2012) as well as introspection on personal values and habits. The sustainability mindset finds expression in the greater good of the whole (Friedlander, 2014; Rimanoczy, 2013). Henry (2009) admonishes that this mindset should also assure that humans are not the centre of concern and attention, but just another species about which we should care.

Firm sustainability strategists who are committed to sustainability practice link sustainability and business strategy through devices such as cause-related marketing and
cradle-to-cradle design (Nathan, 2010; Stead and Stead, 2004) that strive for balance — economic, competitive, social responsibility, and that are in balance with the cycles of nature. A firm operating in a sustainable way is not only financially strong, but socially and environmentally astute (Elkington, 1997). Some fewer go beyond thinking about “when it really pays to be green” [Reinhardt, (2008) p.53] to a concern for ethics and sustainable development that may not necessarily advance shareholder value (Tudway and Pascal, 2006).

While the language of an organisation’s strategic leadership is the language of value creation and unlocking new market growth, the language of strategic sustainability mindset leadership additionally includes green thinking, triple bottom line, collaborative consumption, as well as competitive advantage through sustainability mindedness (Cohen et al., 2014; Deshwal, 2015; Ehnert, 2009; Ferdig, 2007; Kramar, 2014; Renwick et al., 2012).

Additional organisational tactics for reducing environmental impact and strengthening society include: a waste-food sharing economy, resource productivity, up-built natural capital, bio-mimicry, a solution economy, regenerative networking, a service profit chain, base of pyramid strategies, microenterprises, and crowding (Boudreau and Ramstad, 2005; Fairfield et al., 2011; Friedlander, 2014; Harmon et al., 2010).

Necessarily, many of the sustainability-primed initiatives are performed by employees and directly linked to human resource management core functions including selective recruitment and selection, training and development, organisation development and change, performance management, and employee sustainability, among others (Crews, 2010; Mazur, 2014). The spur to plant HRM as a core ‘keeper of the fire’ that supports sustainability consciousness and practice among employees over time is next developed.

4 Sustainable human resource management

“When one tugs at a single thing in nature, one finds that it is attached to the rest of the world.” (John Muir)

HRM may be a sensible and practical ‘keeper of the sustainability flame’ for at least several reasons. First, HRM is in essence about employee sustainability in its many facets [e.g., wellness, employee retention, safety, engagement, and work-life balance (Renwick et al., 2012; Sudin, 2011)]; second, employees, sustained by HRM and in regular and frequent contact with HRM, can come to be influenced and educated by them as well. Third, employee recruits, the millennial generation in particular, are much more likely themselves highly sustainability minded as they search for meaning in work (Renwick et al., 2012). Thus, a strong sustainability position of the firm would be highly desirable to these employees. Hiring workers with such ideology is one essential element in the development of this sustainability mindset (Society for Human Resource Management, 2014). Fourth, HRM executives have gained a heightened status granting them entry to top-level management strategic meetings. Thus, HRM holds a much desired perch for discussions about sustainable HRM and its guiding sustainability mindset. This is especially so for those HRM professionals who use the language and metrics of business in their sustainable HRM advocacy (Paauwe and Boselie, 2003). Finally, HRM
professionals are likely the only ones within the organisation who academically and technically trained to change attitudes and behaviours of managers and employees. After all, HRM is keeper of the organisation’s culture (Wirtenberg et al., 2007).

HRM professionals must understand:

1. Sustainability fundamentals in larger ecological, political, economic, and social contexts.

2. Sustainable HRM that is inter-woven into the very fabric of the organisation and its various strategies at corporate, business unit, and other functional levels (Krishnan, 2005; Nathan, 2010; Savitz and Weber, 2006; Sroufe, 2007; Stead and Stead, 2004).

Learning the fundamentals of sustainable business strategy reinforces the higher standard HRM professionals apply at the executive round table as they not only speak the language of business (Christensen, 2006), but the language of sustainable HRM.

HRM has been traditionally ‘introspective’ and focused upon effective and efficient use of people to achieve financial results now, they must also develop employees who can deal with both present and future sustainability challenges. HRM professionals must be able to conceptualise the bigger picture that recognises employees as integral to the whole.

Significant competitive advantage is made possible through sustainable. HRM’s improvements in reputation, productivity, talent acquisitions, employee retention and engagement, cost effectiveness, risk avoidance and mitigation; innovation, market expansion, and access to capital (Crews, 2010; Haanaes et al., 2012).

Sustainable HRM professionals also weave the sustainability imperative throughout HRM policy and practice and virtually all key functions of HRM. HRM professionals must themselves be astute in matters of employee sustainability, including a strategic awareness of those factors that limit and diminish opportunities for sustainable impact (Society for Human Resource Management, 2014). If HRM professionals are vested in the sustainability cause, they are more likely effective as ‘keepers’ of a sustainability mindset from which can flow ecological, economic, social, and well-being outcomes.

HRM policies, programs, and practices can reinforce sustainability-congruent behaviours. Employee mindset change will have occurred through high quality sustainability intelligence, superb role models for behavioural learning, crisp articulation of sustainability beliefs and values, including audit of possible values and beliefs that may deter sustainability progress (Cohen et al., 2014). Certainly not among the least are included recruitment, selection, and employment practices that use telephonic, virtual interviewing, online training, and telecommuting technologies to save time, money, travel, and environmental wear and tear (Deshwal, 2015).

Proper employee continuing education in sustainability thinking and tools, including innovations that promote sustainability performance may also be addressed (Nidumolu et al., 2009). Concern for a culture that respects sustainable practice and supplies persuasive role models is also integral to this process (Liebowitz, 2010; Stankeviciute and Savaneviciene, 2013). Employee orientations in which the companies’ sustainability values and practice policies are clear are also useful. Development of HRM leadership and management capabilities must support sustainability (Baumgartner, 2009; Gloet, 2006).

Workplace sustainability programs increase employee engagement and extend to employee responsibility for themselves and their careers, their employability, and their
ability to balance roles in the work-life balance (Kundu and Gahlawat, 2016). Employee wellness initiatives can address rising stress levels within organisations by using meditative techniques to counteract rising stress levels, increase employee engagement, increase productivity, improve innovation and intra-preneurship (Benson, 1975; Holm, 2014; Hunt-Stevens, 2014; Langer et al., 2010).

Family-friendly programs such as flextime, job sharing, part time, and new parent leave are useful in work-life balance (Mariappandar, 2012). Further concerns include employee well-being, wellness, and resilience training (Ni and Wang, 2015).


Furthermore, HRM leaders must recognise opportunities to engage with stakeholders outside of firm boundaries, such as the general community, local high schools and colleges, community shelters and others Sustainability partnerships with other external stakeholders, including suppliers, customers, and the local community can become more common (Ertz et al., 2016; Rangarajan et al., 2008). Effective external engagement cannot happen without strong commitment from the leadership team and a personal resolution of the CEO to create a more sustainable company.

Measurable sustainability-related contributions to HRM performance are necessary, including effective recruitment and selection, higher employee retention, lower absenteeism, improved employee well-being, and overall increase in employee engagement, motivation, and productivity (Ni and Wang, 2015). A discussion of additional deliberate sustainability efforts that directly focus upon employees follows.

5 Sustainability conscious employees

“The activist is not the man who says the river is dirty. The activist is the man who cleans up the river.” (Ross Perot)

HRM can come to be keeper of the ‘sustainability flame’ in its many sustainable employment practices. In turn, employees recruited and selected in part for their sustainability sensibilities may grow yet further in sustainability mindedness. Employees who themselves value sustainability are selected because they already understand why sustainability matters and can be expected to more readily work sustainability thinking into their daily work practice (Ni and Wang, 2015). In turn, sustainability minded employees are much more likely to want to continue to work in an organisation that is sustainability astute (Bartenhagen and Feyerherm, 2013; Deshwal, 2015; Ehnert, 2006; Kundu and Gahlawat, 2016).

Ideas for nurturing sustainability consciousness among employees are abundant, including: formation of green teams to consider earth-conscious measures, use of imaginative means to publicise employee and progress in sustainability performance such as the display of thrown out water bottles for impact. Conservation notes may be placed alongside light switches and printers. Use of paper clips might be encouraged instead of staples. Screen savers may be removed and screen settings changed to hibernate or sleep when away from computers for more than ten minutes. Hidden power usage may be
avoided by switching to a standby setting, and turn-off task or overhead lighting (Deshwal, 2015; McNeil et al., 2011).

Employee green awards can be dispensed to those who take advantage of go green incentives for car-pooling to work or use of public transportation. Bonuses for work on sustainability projects hold merit (Nidumolu et al., 2009). Senior management publicity and recognition for employee successful sustainability initiatives can be used (Bhattacharya et al., 2008). Recycling bins may be placed in more than one location, including personal recycling bins Use of air purifying plants in offices may be encouraged.

Also included are employee courses that address the development of new technical and management competencies that are especially important in fostering sustainability innovation (Liebowitz, 2010; Laurson and Foss, 2003; Renwick et al., 2013). Town hall meetings where employees are encouraged to suggest new ideas for more energy efficient products and services can be useful (Liebowitz, 2010).

The sustainability mindset requires protection against naysayers and bad quality information. Outcomes of sustainability infused practice must be communicated back to employees – in small wins, and over time in ways both tangible (such as financial returns) and intangible (such as a positive and supportive culture) (Crew, 2010; Gloet, 2006).

Sustainable choices at work may further influence such choices within employees’ homes and communities. Employees may find that they want to try a sustainability tactic at home that was introduced at work, indicating the power of these initiatives to have lasting and far reaching effects on employees and those whom they in turn may influence.

HRM maintains as the ‘keeper of the fire’ for sustainability, using opportunities to awaken and remind leaders and employees alike of the inherent sensibility of employee sustainability consciousness for edge, for purposeful contribution beyond profit, for support from employees (in particular those who are from the millennial generation), and for partnership with the local community as well.

6 Discussion and future directions

‘He who knows the most, he who knows what sweets and virtues are in the ground, the waters, the plants, the heavens, and how to come at these enchantments, is the rich and royal man.’ (R.W. Emerson)

This paper emphasises the sustainability mindset as a key, core feature of sustainable HRM because it is known that mindset frames reality and appropriate actions flow directly from mindset (Dweck, 2007).

HRM is here offered as a natural sustainability ‘keeper of the flame’ for varied reasons as mentioned earlier in this paper. As ‘keeper of the culture’, crafter of HRM policies, procedures, and practices, chief gate-keeper for new employee entry into the firm, and chief care-taker of employee well-being, HRM is powerfully positioned for a sustainability leadership role.

Sustainability research goes back for at least a full generation among those who are ecology-minded (Stead and Stead, 2004). Sustainability goes much further beyond cost savings or window dressing or even social responsibility (Thom and Zaugg, 2004).
There is much more sustainable HRM work to be done than has been done thus far. This work is needed for within – HRM phenomena (such as core functions of training and development), at the interfaces between HRM and the rest of the organisation, as well as HRM sustainability links to the external environment. To follow are several key directions that are critical to sustainable HRM progress. The compass model of sustainability described earlier in this paper and depicted in Figure 1 serves to guide this discussion.

6.1 N-nature

Green HRM focuses upon HRM activities that enhance positive environmental outcomes (Kramar, 2014). Job candidates show preferences for organisations that are ‘green’ (Brockett, 2006). It will be interesting to learn more about how these sustainability conscious recruits can influence others in the organisation to ‘think green’. It is also interesting to explore what practices enable these employees to express their fuller range of sustainability sentiments and knowledge. These employees may be more ‘green conscious’, but are they also generally exceptional? Further work might also explore what particular knowledge and skills sustainability-primed employees bring to the employer. How else might these employees swell the appreciation for sustainability organisation-wide?.

Employers can also use green practices as a means to establish brand and environmental reputation to prospective employees (Renwick et al., 2013). Green HRM can incentivise sustainability practice among senior managers (Renwick, et al., 2013).

Furthermore, exploration of how the sustainability mindset can influence employee green innovation and intrapreneurship is critical (Buhl et al., 2016). Employee-driven eco-innovations can create environmental and competitive advantages for organisations that lead to environmental improvements. In fact, an ability to learn about and utilise concepts and strategies for sustainable HRM becomes a core competency for the HRM function.

Business leaders are increasingly finding that sustainability-guided strategies are often the most profitable ones (Nidumolu et al., 2009; Willard, 2002) How does sustainability principles and mindset guide HRM decisions in ways that make them more effective and efficient for the HRM function? What other direct and indirect effects does the sustainability mindset have on organisational performance, reputation, and culture?. How do other general facets of environmental sustainability (such as living by the principles of minimalism and simplicity) affect employees and their contributions within the workplace (Segal, 2003)? How does ‘collaborative consumption’ in which we take only what is needed play out within the organisation (cf: Ertz et al., 2016; Belk, 2014; Botsman and Roo, 2010)?.

6.2 E-economy

Human societies, communities, and organisations need functioning economies to provide their needs and support their aspirations (Steele, 2012). Relatively recent economic developments such as the ‘gig economy’/shared economy of app.-based freelancing for platforms like Uber or TaskRabbit (Muro, 2016), are but several of the manifestations of this new economy. Some suggest that this new economy will potentially cannibalise more conventional payroll work.
Collaborative consumption, not mediated by the gig economy, might directly invite sharing initiatives within local HRM communities with such programs as ride-sharing, childcare services, and more. Collaborative consumption has participants mutualise access to products or services rather than encouraging individual ownership (Hamari et al., 2016; Radenko, 2013); it builds stronger communities and saves money.

In the ‘knowledge economy’ knowledge-based organisations, employees possess knowledge and skills that have major impacts on organisational performance. These employees are not so readily substitutable and their retention is particularly important (Stone and Deadrick, 2015).

Further work is also needed pertaining to HRM efforts to maintain a balance of people, profit, and planets. Such devices as the sustainability scorecard are useful to this end as HRM faces tension between programs that support employment stability and employee advocacy vs. ones that serve the economy and company profit performance (Marchington, 2015). It is troublesome that the HRM function’s initiatives to become strategic in their organisational positioning and decision frameworks could instead create a de-emphasis upon employee sustainability concerns (Marchington, 2015; Van Buren et al., 2011; Van de Voorde et al., 2012). Especially if sustainability is not integral to the organisation culture, it may be especially difficult for HRM to manage the strategic tug among people, profit, and planet.

6.3 W-well-being

Employee well-being involves physical health, mental health, stress, motivation, commitment, job satisfaction, morale, and climate facets (Grawitch, 2006). Sustainable HRM is not just about making employees more sustainability conscious, but also about employees making themselves more sustainable as human beings. Concerns for employee well-being and happiness continue to be of critical interest to HRM professionals (Grawitch et al., 2006; Guest, 2002; Kossek et al., 2012).

The concerns for employee welfare in recent years have uncovered some highly useful ideas for HRM as culture keeper. For example, reduction of harm of work practices restricts employees from achieving positive work-related well-being outcomes and work-life balance in general. Harm of work problems include work intensification, work overload, and competing task demands that restrict employees from achieving positive work-related health and social well-being outcomes (Mariappandar, 2012; Van de Voorde et al., 2012).

HRM researchers also assess the scope of damage to employees and workplaces that result from incivility, bullying, and toxic cultures and personalities (Cortina et al., 2001; Einarsen, 1997; Kossek et al., 2012). These practices hurt not just targeted victims but productivity and well-being of the organisation as a whole. What policies and practices are most effective for sustainable HRM to put in place to ameliorate employee health and wellness stressors?

Employers have lessened attachment to workers with understaffing and overwork cultures. Some employee are linked to work through e-work computers that require 24-7 demands be placed upon them. Such precarious work has unpredictable, non-standard schedules with little or no job security. Such work can have pay systems that transfer risk and fluctuations in customer and product market demands from the employer to the employee (Kossek et al., 2012).
Healthy workplace concerns also relate to work-life balance, employee growth and development, health and safety recognition, and employee involvement (Grawitch et al., 2006). A healthy workplace “maximises the integration of worker goals for well-being and company objectives for profitability and productivity [Sauter et al., (1996), p.250].

Many employee diseases such as heart and diabetes can be prevented altogether (Center for Disease Control, 2015). Stress-balancing meditation stations, nap pods, and yoga classes are also possible offerings (Rand Health, 2013).

6.4 S-society

Social systems can organise in ways that promote equity, fairness, resilience, and opportunity for all. Work satisfaction is associated with higher performance, equal opportunity, family-friendly, and anti-harassment practices (Guest, 2002).

How high-pressure organisations be designed to perform? One line of research has studied resilience in organisations (Maddi and Khoshaba, 2005). Resilience is “good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development [Masten, (2001), p.228]. Mindsets can change and can promote resilience (Yeager and Dweck, 2012).

Another idea with great promise to the end of equity, fairness, resilience, and opportunity for all is the deliberately developmental organisation. Kegan et al. (2014) prepared a recent white paper on a new breed of companies (such as the finance corporation. Bridgewater associates, LP, that are committed to development for all employees, not just a select few executives and those others who are designated high potential. This type of organisation holds the radical conviction that firms will best prosper when deeply aligned with people’s strongest motive – to grow.

HRM is increasingly required to be the conscience of the organisation and the ethical steward (Greenwood and Van Buren, 2014). Developing a culture to support sustainability efforts must go beyond compliance to win the ‘hearts and minds’ to this cause and get employees to buy in. A culture of psychological empowerment increases employee willingness to make suggestions to this end (Kitazawa and Sarkis, 2000; Simpson and Samson, 2008).

HRM professionals themselves continue to battle with the challenges facing them as they advance to the executive table, but then find it more difficult to advocate for employees as they seek to legitimise their position as executive business partner (Cleveland et al., 2015). What can HRM do about this? What strategies might they use to further support their positioning, yet permit them to advocate for employees as is much needed? HRM faces pressures to eschew traditional roles as employee champions in order to gain acceptance by others within the organisation Strategic choices such as large-scale downsizing and use of the contingent employee become mainstream HRM intensify felt pressure (Cavanaugh and Noe, 1999).

Not all HRM professionals believe that HRM should be a key steward of sustainability, although more and more may believe that HRM should take a more central role in this matter (Lawler and Mohrman, 2014). What models of sustainable HRM are able to reconcile a sustainability core for the HR professional and function?

Many in HRM may not currently have the training in sustainability and sustainable HRM and may not know how to foster a sustainability mindset and practice (Rimanoczy, 2013). Do we know what should be the specific nature of the sustainability training for HR professionals? Does the sustainability mindset work as is posited in this and other like papers?
HRM professionals continue to seek a means to measure and track triple bottom line performance (people, planet, and profits) in meaningful and consistent ways (Pava, 2007; Figge et al., 2002; Norman and MacDonald, 2003). Many organisations are reporting data on triple bottom line performance, but not how employees are treated. The people focus is frequently more about community impact, not employee impact. This has led Lawler and Mohrman (2014) to suggest a quadruple bottom line in which the ‘people’ category consists of two sets of people impact – community and employee. Since employer treatment of employee likely has a larger impact on employee financials, this adjustment might be particularly effective.

Empirical support beyond anecdotal evidence of organisational sustainability performance and even more so for sustainable HRM is much needed (Crews, 2010). Sustainable HRM measures include climate, well-being and work-life balance surveys; prediction of future supply and demand of capabilities through workforce planning, estimation of the carbon footprint, and the sustainability scorecard (Figge, et al., 2002; Kramar, 2014). Practical and powerful means with which to support the HRM function’s advancement to a sustainability mindset. Further study for virtually every function of HRM as a critical centre of sustainability consciousness is required.

There is much work ahead for sustainable HRM in practice Sustainability must ultimately be a way of life and work-life for organisations around the world (Chappell, 1996; Elkington, 1997; Trapp, 2015). To this end, a genuine grasp of the sustainability mindset and sustainable HRM is critical along with corresponding HRM skill-building in change management, collaboration and teamwork, inculcation of values, leadership development, training and development, diversity and multiculturalism, ethics and governance, talent management, and workforce engagement (Ferdig, 2007; Mazur, 2014). Managed cooperation among stakeholders – both internal and external – is possible due to a shared passion, shared sustainability values, resource sharing, and collaborative research and development.

“He who cannot change the very fabric of his thought will never be able to change reality” (El-Sadat).

This quote underscores why we must continue this journey for sustainable development with thoughts inherent to a sustainability mindset.

References


**Notes**