Chapter 73
Information Sharing and Cognitive Involvement for Sustainable Workplaces

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ABSTRACT

In the last few years a vibrant multi- and trans-disciplinary debate has developed around the topic of sustainability in the management of human resources. The need to go beyond old approaches based on the "use" of human resources as "factor of production" has been outlined from different points of view. To contribute to the existing knowledge about the development of more efficient, effective and sustainable approaches in human resource management, this chapter aims to investigate possible pathways and key dimensions in defining more sustainable workplaces by acting on information sharing and cognitive involvement. A possible conceptual framework for clarifying different concepts of the workplace is proposed and some implications are outlined for managerial studies in the light of information sharing and cognitive involvement.

INTRODUCTION

In the foreword of an interesting book published in 2003, Peter Johnston wrote that:

…the next 5-10 years will see a major transformation in work. Wireless communications will allow us to work anywhere and voice recognition will liberate us from the keyboard. Information and communications technologies will become more pervasive, yet social contacts will become more important and more diverse. (p. 5)

After more than a decade, this can be considered a suitable forecast of the latter evolutions registered in social and economic dynamics.

In this vein, it is possible to affirm that some recent changes in the social and economic balance, such as the collapse of physical and psychological boundaries among countries, cultures and markets, the challenging opportunities offered by the evolution of information and communication technologies and the increasing awareness of social and economic actors concerning their needs, have profoundly affected the social and economic structures in which we all live (Caputo, Evangelista, & Russo, 2016; Evangelista, Caputo, Russo, & Buhnova, 2016; Geyskens & Steenkamp, 2000; Inglehart, 1997; Parsons & Smelser, 2005; Perez, 1983).

As a reaction to all these changes, different researchers and practitioners have tried to identify more efficient instruments, models and approaches to manage the newly emerging variety (Barile, Saviano, & Caputo, 2015; Camarinha-Matos & Afsarmanesh, 2004; Chesbrough, 2013; Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997). Increasing attention has been focused on the relationship between producers and users (Malerba, 2006; Moorman, Zaltman, & Deshpande, 1992; Vargo, Wieland, & Akaka, 2015), on the roles and positions of social and economic actors (Granovetter, 1985; Vargo, 2009) and on strategies to improve the alignment among actors influenced by different cultural and psychological backgrounds (Caputo, 2016; Di Nauta, Merola, Caputo, & Evangelista, 2015; Edvardsson, Tronvoll, & Gruber, 2011).

Thanks to the advancements in knowledge offered by all these contributions, different research streams have started to include in their models variables and dimensions forgotten for a long time (Spreitzer, 1995). Managerial, marketing and organizational studies have started to investigate the ways in which human resources can support decision makers and organizations in gaining a better understanding of and managing the emerging complexity (Barile & Saviano, 2010; Saviano & Berardi, 2009). Several empirical and theoretical contributions have highlighted the need to develop models able to provide a better valorisation of employees' contributions by adopting more sustainable approaches (Barile, Franco, Nota, & Saviano, 2012; Ostrom et al., 2002; Wilkinson, 2005).

More specifically, in the last few years, an increasing number of researchers and practitioners have become interested in the topic of sustainability in the management of human resources and a vibrant multi- and trans-disciplinary debate has arisen (Barile, Saviano, Polese, & Caputo, 2015; Del Giudice, Caputo, & Evangelista, 2016). Many have underlined the need to overcome the old approaches based on the "use" of human resources as "factor of production" (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014) and have tried to define directions and guidelines to valorise the physical and intellectual contributions of human resources in the organizations' plans, strategies and activities (Caputo, Giudice, Evangelista, & Russo, 2016; Youndt, Snell, Dean, & Lepak, 1996). Moreover, they have proposed in-depth changes in perspective in relation to ways of approaching and managing human resources (Heneman et al., 2000).

However, despite the useful advancements in knowledge offered by all these contributions, a clear vision of the meaning of sustainability in the management of human resources and a clear pathway to follow in developing the sustainable management of human resources still appear to be lacking (Barile, Saviano, Iandolo, & Caputo, 2015). With reference to this, some relevant questions remain unanswered, including the following:

What does it mean to develop sustainable approaches in the management of human resources?

What are the key drivers on which the planning of more sustainable workplaces can be based?

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