Corporate sustainability - corporate's perception, historical concepts and contribution of ergonomics

Claudio Brunoro, Ivan Bolis, Laerte Szelwar, Bruno Kawasaki

Department of Production Engineering - Polytechnic School - University of São Paulo, BRAZIL

1. Introduction

Organizations aligned with sustainable development concepts take into account in their actions aspects related to the environmental, economic and social dimensions (Bansal 2005; Montiel 2008; Steurer et al. 2005; van Marrewijk 2003; Figge & Hahn 2004; Gladwin et al. 1995; Elkington 1994; Elkington 1997). They shall make use of sustainable production systems and therefore possess a healthy work environment (Fischer & Zink 2012; Zink 2013; Docherty et al. 2009; Kira & Eijnatten 2009). Thus, in a research about work-related issues and corporate sustainability conducted in Brazil, the goal was to explore how work-related issues are addressed in the corporate context.

Thus, the research objectives are: 1) to explore the presence of work-related issues and their origins in corporate sustainability approach; 2) to capture corporate’s perception about corporate sustainability and work-related issues; and 3) to present the activity-centred ergonomics and psychodynamics of work contributions to work-related issues in a corporate sustainability approach.

2. Method

An exploratory research based on multiple source of evidence, such as document analysis (corporate annual reports and corporate websites), survey questionnaires and case studies (with 10 large corporations in Brazil).

The information obtained from the case studies was analysed to identify the guiding elements for the formulation of the work-related concepts from the perspective of corporate sustainability. With the data collected from multiple sources of evidence, the information was evaluated from an inductive standpoint.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 The presence of work-related issues and their origins in corporate sustainability approach

Corporate sustainability practices related to work issues was identified, named: account of human rights and decent work; encouragement of volunteer work; investment in professional development; health and well-being programs and health and safety at work programs (Brunoro et al. 2013). Table 1 presents the themes related direct or indirectly to the internal social dimension (workers) that are mentioned on the websites of the analyzed companies.

Table 1: Work-related themes mentioned on the companies’ websites

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<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Human rights and decent work</th>
<th>Volunteer Work</th>
<th>Professional Development / Training and Education</th>
<th>Health and Well-being</th>
<th>Health and Safety at Work</th>
<th>Diversity and equal opportunity</th>
<th>Concern about the environment</th>
<th>Practices in the supply chain</th>
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Besides, the companies mention the internal public (workers) in their definitions of sustainability (or related terms) on their official websites. In addition, in their corporate reports and other sources, they also describe the use of guidelines that include practices involving their internal public (workers). Moreover, work-related issues have been present ever since the earliest sustainable development documents. It is feasible to construct an empirical framework to work-related issues and corporate sustainability approach (Brunoro et al. 2012).

3.2 Corporate’s perception about corporate sustainability and work-related issues

The interviewed companies place work-related sustainability practices in a high position. In addition to what they consider the minimum necessary (compliance with laws and human rights / decent work), they also have health and safety programs; as well as programs for health and well-being / quality of life, actions in the supply chain; actions aimed at diversity, equality and care of special needs; professional development activities; a code of conduct and/or an ethics committee, among other actions. The companies consider that their benefits and actions must be aligned with their objectives. In general, they point out that the benefits policy pertains to the internal social dimension of sustainability, since these benefits are not random, and must be in line with the company’s business. For instance, benefits in education are better structured if the company considers the generation of knowledge relevant to its business (nutrition and well-being if it operates in the food sector; health and safety if it operates in the sector of high-risk industrial processes).

With regard to a healthy work environment, this is evidenced by the health and safety actions, mainly in terms of the physical aspects of the work environment. As for psychological or mental issues, practices to ensure health and well-being and quality of life were observed.

3.3 Activity-centred ergonomics and psychodynamics of work contributions to work-related issues in a corporate sustainability approach

Sustainability is achieved through the work, that is, the worker is the agent for sustainability. At the same time, there are initiatives in which the worker is the focus of sustainability. There are some indicators that should be redesigned in order to translate more precisely the reality of some workplaces, especially related to organizational design and mental health.

From both activity-centred ergonomics and psychodynamics of work point of view, a work in a sustainability approach, based on worker’s perspective, should be one that provide at least meaning and sense (Brunoro 2013).

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References


