Expanded abstract

Social Economy Values: Human Resource Management and Sustainability

Objectives

The current economic and social model needs to be reoriented toward more sustainable models, where Social Economy firms can be more efficient and sustainable. It is fundamental to delve into the management of Social Economy entities and explain their behaviour and contribution to sustainability. Therefore, the aim of this study is to present a theoretical model that shows the functioning mechanisms of Social Economy entities and associates the principles that govern this type of companies with certain organisational values. Such values, in turn, are specified in certain human resource management practices that have proved successful in the search for economic, social and environmental sustainability.

As a starting proposition, we consider that Social Economy entities are a sustainable model, where their principles and values influence such sustainability. The setting of a social entity begins with the establishment of some principles that are regulated by the applicable legislation. These principles pursue a clear general economic and social interest and aim to combine social progress and business efficiency. However, it is their values which grant entities their distinctive personality, values with a clear orientation toward business ethics and social responsibility. Our proposition is based on the fact that the business model of Social Economy is founded on organisational principles and values that are in line with the concept of economic, social and environmental sustainability. These values guide Social Economy firms toward the attainment of the 2030 Agenda Goals, especially regarding full and quality employment for everyone, with the aim of generating sustained, inclusive and sustainable growth (Steiner, 2018).

The methodological design

The methodology used is based on the use of qualitative techniques, and it was designed in two phases.

The first phase consisted in narrowing down the target population of the study, resorting to the "*Relevant Social Economy Firms 2016-2017*" report, published at the beginning of 2018 by the Spanish Business Confederacy of Social Economy (CEPES, 2018), which is the highest representative entity of Social Economy in Spain. Such report gathers data about the turnover, employment, territory and activity of 848 Social Economy entities, classified by their legal form from highest to lowest turnover, thus providing a representative sample of the different entities that compose the Spanish Social Economy. The entities gathered in such report pose

an important narrowing down of the sector and, thus, a great opportunity to determine which organisational values are the most significant for these firms.

In the second phase, an analysis was performed on the corporate values of Social Economy firms from the sample provided by CEPES. The organisational values of each of the organisations were checked through their corporate website, obtaining data about the organisational values of 262 Social Economy entities. To this end, we used the NVivo 11 software for Windows, which was designed to organise, analyse and find perspectives of non-structured or qualitative data, such as interviews, answers to open questions, articles, content in social networks and, in our case, content in corporate websites. Among the different tools of *NVivo 11*, we used the word frequency check, through which the software allows enumerating the words that appear more frequently in resources, nodes, annotations and selected sets. To handle the obtained data, we previously defined the reference nodes, considering nodes as correlations of references about a topic, place, person or any other particular area of interest. The references were compiled by reading the resources, such as interviews and specific groups of interest, and subsequently classifying the information by categories in the relevant nodes; in our case, each organisational value was considered as a node and, therefore, defined for it to be recognised by the application in the dataset either by the word or by the definition.

Results

The obtained results showed the three organisational values that appear most frequently in the different Social Economy entities analysed: perceived support, respect and responsibility.

Perceived support is based on the theory of social exchange (Mael & Ashforth, 1992), according to which the workers tend to change effort and dedication for their organisation through tangible incentives, such as competitive salaries, social benefits or emotional incentives (e.g., appreciation or recognition). Therefore, perceived organisational support has a direct influence on the business relationship between the company and the employee, generating an important bond (Rocha, 2015).

Respect is present within organisations and improves their effective communication, as well as the management of diversity, which is understood as the heterogeneity in the distribution of the personal characteristics of the members of an organisation without disregarding their cultural differences. Thus, workers are valued by their capacities, competencies, skills and knowledge, excluding from this valuation aspects such as gender, age and ethnicity, among others (Järlström et al., 2018).

Responsibility governs the creation of a business model that prioritises the concept of sustainability, adding value and placing economic, social and environmental aspects at the same level. Organisations that regard this organisational value as important assume that their economic profit is not above the working conditions of their employees (Wagner, 2013).

The obtained results are coherent with the existing literature. Authors such as Connelly et al. (2011) explored the potential of the values promoted by Social Economy in the search for a more sustainable environment, through business initiatives aimed at creating a synthesis of economic, social and environmental goals that lead us to achieve a structural change in

the way in which goods and services are produced, accessed and consumed in our society. Therefore, as the main contribution of this study, we propose that the organisational values of Perceived Support, Respect and Responsibility are directly associated with Social Economy entities and their economic, social and environmental sustainability.

Original Value and Contribution

The present study contributes to the existing literature from a double perspective. Firstly, it proposes a theoretical model that aims to show the management mechanisms that can lead Social Economy entities to attain better results in corporate sustainability: lower business destruction rate and lower employment destruction rate during the crisis, greater inclusion and social cohesion, better results in environmental sustainability, etc. Such model proposed that the principles on which Social Economy is founded are transformed into corporate values that imbue their strategy and way of acting. Among these values, most of the analysed entities show Perceived Support, Respect and Responsibility. Each of these values are, in turn, instrumentalised in the business management practice in a very diverse manner, although our model is only focused on how they are converted to a certain way of managing people in Social Economy entities. It is the Human Resource Management practices, imbued with the organisational values, the ones that allow for better results in sustainability.

Secondly, our study analysed a sample of Social Economy entities, through which we determined the three most representative values in Social Economy. It is important to highlight the relevance of the human resource in the development of each of these three values in this type of entities, which place their workers at the core of their management, granting them greater participation, both in the management and in decision making. This guarantees stable and quality employment, ensuring the necessary stability that enhances the commitment between employee and employer. Likewise, the entities analysed in our study are important employment enclaves for population sectors with serious difficulties to access a quality job. The management of the heterogeneity of an organisation's workforce is fundamental in Social Economy entities, where aspects such as equality and reconciliation of the work and personal life become a priority in their human resource management.

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