

EXPANDED ABSTRACT

Socially responsible human resource management in colombian worker cooperatives

In the recent years there has been an increasing interest in studying the relationship between social responsibility and human resource management. Giving rise to socially responsible human resource management, a field of study aiming to integrate the developments of social responsibility and human resource management. The perspectives adopted in order to understand each one of these aspects and the emphasis on each other, influence the approaches, ideas and objectives conferred to socially responsible human resource management.

Theoretical debates about this relationship between social responsibility and human resource management are based mainly on an instrumental perspective, emphasizing one of both fields in an attempt to understand how human resource management helps to manage the social responsibility of the organizations, or how the latter helps to achieve the organizational goals of the human resource management areas. From a social integrative perspective, the main issue is to find a meeting point, that is, a concept and an objective that allows to integrate both fields of study.

The objective of this research is to conceptualize the socially responsible human resource management in the context of Colombian worker cooperatives from a perspective that integrates the Amartya Sen' capability approach and the cooperative principles in order to understand how the practices in human resource management develop different capabilities in each associate. From capability approach, this research proposes that the objective of the socially responsible human resource management be the development of the associates' capabilities of agency, well-being and solidarity. This is achieved through the human resource management practices that these cooperatives use and that translate the cooperative principles into actions. The human resource management practices analyzed are the ones included in the main international standards of social responsibility that place an emphasis in the labor dimension and in the researches carried out by several authors interested in the topic, which are: information, training, participation, work conditions, health and safety at work, equality of opportunities, and work-family balance. However, these practices, seen from this research, acquire a new meaning as practices of empowerment, well-being and projection to community because they have one objective: the development of the capabilities of each associate.

In order to achieve this objective, a qualitative research was carried out based on the grounded theory and the multiple case study of three Colombian worker cooperatives of the textile-manufacturing sector. The data was gathered using semi-structured interviews, group workshops, and bibliographical review and were analyzed using the grounded theory methodology with the help of the Atlas.ti software, version 7.

Thanks to this research, it was possible to find out that the information, training, participation and equality of opportunity practices contribute to the associate's empowerment and help in the development of their agency capability; that is, they strengthen their autonomy and responsibility as cooperative workers, owners and managers.

While the prevailing literature assesses the worker well-being in terms of organizational commitment, job satisfaction and performance, this research suggests a different conception in order to study the well-being practices in terms of work, economic and social opportunities offered to the associates through training, participation, work conditions, health and safety at work, and work-family balance. These practices help to develop the well-being capability. This implies a focus change in the understanding of well-being.

In the current literature about social responsibility and human resource management, some authors consider that the information and training practices evolve into practices of projection towards the community, situation that has been demonstrated in this study. These practices contribute to the development of solidarity capability. This research proposes the solidarity capability as a new dimension to be considered in the Amartya Sen' capability approach. The level of analysis used by Sen is the individual, who develops the agency capability when he acts autonomously and takes responsibility of his actions. The findings of this research indicate that responsibility is a concept that lies beneath the worker cooperative associates' agency and solidarity capabilities, but occurs in different perspectives: individual (agency capability), and collective (solidarity capability). Thus, solidarity capability implies the recognition of the bonds that connect associates with a collective of people: the cooperative and the community, and, as member of these collectives, it is important to take responsibilities.

Based on the findings of this research, socially responsible human resource management in worker cooperatives is defined as a set of practices based in the cooperative principles aimed to the development of the agency, well-being and solidarity capabilities of associates through information, training, participation, work conditions, health and safety at work, equality of opportunities, and work-family balance in order to empower them as workers, owners and managers of the cooperative, providing job, economic and social opportunities that contribute to their well-being and allow them to be and do what they believe is better for their lives, and allowing the projection towards community through information and training. In order to achieve this purpose, it is necessary to take into account the personal, organizational and environmental conditions that affect these practices, the compliance of the cooperative principles and the development of associates' capabilities.

There are personal conditions such academic level, health status and familial commitments. Other conditions arise from the dynamic of the cooperative organization, such as the work methods, the relationships between associates and leaders, the intervention of third parties in the decisions of the cooperatives. While other conditions, as normativity and location, come from the environment in which these cooperatives function. Each condition has an impact in the human resource management practices used by the cooperatives and in the development of the associates' capabilities. The challenge

for the associates is to recognize and transform these conditions and to decide which ones favor or block their opportunities for achieving the life they want.

The data analyzed allow to conclude that it is possible to perform a socially responsible human resource management in the Colombian worker cooperatives of the textile-manufacturing sector when they work following the cooperative principles, which are constituted in their creation and contribute to the empowerment and well-being of associates and to the projection towards the community, developing in them an agency, well-being and solidarity capability. Likewise, they are able to achieve their Mission through the creation of stable job opportunities, granting associates with additional work conditions to the ones legally established, providing well-being to associates and their families and projecting themselves towards the communities through information and training practices. However, it is necessary to boost the information practices aimed to the community and to make public the socially responsible human resource management practices that cooperatives execute in order to draw attention to the organization contributions for the development of the people and community of the place where they are. In addition, this will help to the understanding and recognition of the worker cooperatives as a legitimate model of entrepreneurship.

The socially responsible human resource management conceptualization proposed in this research takes on different perspectives to the ones traditionally used. On one hand, it builds a social integrative perspective based in the capability approach, human resource management practices in the context of social responsibility and cooperative principles. On the other, it adopts a multi-level focus that helps to understand how the cooperative principles —institutional level— translate into human resource management practices —organization level— and help to explain the consequences of these practices in the development of the associates' capabilities —individual level—.

There are some limitations to this work. The study context is focused in Colombian worker cooperatives of the textile-manufacturing sector, future researches could replicate this study's theoretical proposals for analyzing the worker cooperatives of different economic sectors, different countries or other types of cooperatives, or for carrying out comparative studies with other kinds of companies. Moreover, the conceptualization of the associates' agency, well-being and solidarity capabilities has been developed in theoretical terms, future studies could use or analyze these capabilities from a quantitative approach.

KEYWORDS: Socially Responsible Human Resource Management, Worker Cooperatives, Cooperative Principles, Human Resource Management, Social Responsibility, Capability Approach, Grounded Theory.