For All Good Reasons: Role of Values in Social Sustainability

By
Liviu Florea*

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Washburn University
School of Business
1700 SW College Ave.
Topeka, KS 66621
785-670-1308
www.washburn.edu/business

* Liviu Florea is assistant professor of management, Washburn University, School of Business, Topeka, KS. Comments should be directed to Liviu Flroea, School of Business, Washburn University, 1700 SW College Ave. Topeka, Kansas 66621, 785-670-1603, liviu.florea@washburn.edu.

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Abstract

Human resource management practices are at the heart of most organizations' social sustainability efforts. Despite the importance of human values for the design and implementation of such practices, few researchers analyzed how values relate to human resource management practices in organizations. The purpose of this conceptual paper is to integrate scholarship on social sustainability, human resources practices, and human values in delineating how four specific values – altruism, empathy, positive norm of reciprocity, and private self-effacement – support effective human resources practices in organizations. This paper identifies a set of distinct values that have sustainability implications and global relevance, and develops propositions with the objective of proposing relationships between these values and human resources practices, as well as effects of resource-based theory in potentiating these relationships. The current analysis suggests that values are potentially important for planning and implementing effective human resources practices.

For All Good Reasons: Role of Values in Social Sustainability

An organization's sustainability may require the implementation of effective human resources practices, which in turn may depend on the values cherished by the organization's employees. Yet little is known about antecedents of the effective human resources practices that can favorably influence the social component of sustainability. For example, Connor and Becker (1975) specifically mentioned that "little attention has been paid to the interaction between properties of organizational settings and values of the actors therein" (p. 550). This conceptual paper posits that the relative prevalence of certain values is favorably reflected in the design, planning, and implementation of human resources practices, which subsequently potentiate social sustainability. Such human resources practices include: developmental activities including on-boarding and coaching, consulting with the objective of identifying causes for skill gaps and performance deficiencies, succession planning, and developing critical competencies.

The relationships between values and human resource practices are analyzed in the context of the resource-dependence theory (Barney, 1991). According to the resource-dependence research, organizations can derive a sustained competitive advantage from human resources practices that add value, are rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (Barney, 1991). In addition to the implementation of adequate human resources practices, the four values mentioned above may serve as a source of social sustainability for the organization. These values potentiate the effect of human resources practices and suggest possible explanation for the manner in which effective human resources practices create competitive advantages in a systematic manner.

Most research in the area of sustainability and competitive advantage took a predominantly economic perspective, suggesting that employees are committed to high performance when their organization treats them well. In turn, employees who are treated well are likely to have good work performances and be treated even better by their organization, therefore creating a *virtuous spiral* (Lawler, 2004). However, the social sustainability or the people-oriented side of the sustainability has received little attention in this area of research. In spite of the obvious importance of employees and managers, little is known about factors that may enhance sustainability through its social component. Previous research seems to take for granted that employees simply *answer* to organizational actions, overlooking that employees can *shape* managerial practices and either enhance or inhibit organization's effectiveness.

Although often less visible and downplayed by some organizational members as irrelevant in the context of pay-for-performance and similar short-term oriented practices, values are instrumental in fostering engagement and motivation of organizational members. While treating employees in ways that are rewarding is likely to be efficient from an organizational standpoint, it may be not enough for ensuring organizational long-term effectiveness. Consequently, the current paper provides some insight into the relationships between values and human resources practices. More specifically, using the resource-dependence theoretical framework, this paper draws from a variety of literatures to generate propositions explaining how distinct values encourage the use of specific human resources practices, an area that deserves research attention.

One premise of this research is that human resources practices are instrumental for an organization's social sustainability. This paper reveals circumstances that encourage effective organizational practices. The research question asked is: "What values support effective human

resources practices?" The paper includes sustainability, values, and human resources practices sections, as well as the delineation of the resource-based theoretical framework. Then, it develops propositions linking values and human resources practices, in the context of the resource-dependence theory and outlines conclusions and implications.

Sustainability

Sustainability refers to longevity, continuity and capability to be maintained. According to the World Commission on Environment and Development (1983), sustainability means "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (retrieved July 8, 2009, http://www.epa.gov/sustainability/). Sustainability describes the ability of the business to sustain itself through time, while contributing to the improvement of society (Cohen, 2010).

In organizations, the notion of sustainability has been associated primarily with economic prosperity, including financial strength and good products or services, the so-called *bottom line*. The implicit assumption has been that prosperous and financially-sound organizations are likely to perpetuate their comparative advantage and develop over time. According to this current of thought, if any one part falters, the organization is unlikely to develop. Meanwhile, another prevailing direction of research relates the notion of sustainability to environmental integrity, highlighting the obligation of current generation to safeguard the ability of future generations to meet own needs. In conjunction with economic prosperity and environmental integrity, social sustainability is one of the *three pillars of sustainability* (Bansal, 2005). Social sustainability emphasizes the importance of investments in socially responsible practices that can help the

organization to gain a competitive advantage. An organization that is better than its competitors at providing products or services and can hold that advantage over a period of time is said to have a sustained competitive advantage.

Focus on economic prosperity and environmental integrity may have postponed efforts to understand, and even define, social sustainability. It is likely that social sustainability means more than equity, organizational citizenship behavior to voluntarily help employees in need, and philanthropy to contribute to organization's public relations efforts. Dillard, Dujon and King (2009) defined social sustainability as social institutions that facilitate environmental and economic sustainability and processes that generate social health and well-being.

Values

Employees' values guide the development of individuals and interactions in organizations. Values are defined by Rokeach (1979) as abstract ideas and general standards derived, learned, and internalized from society and its institutions, and by Hofstede (1984) as "broad tendencies to prefer certain states of affairs over others" (p.18). Values underlie and pertain to work behaviors and are likely to be encapsulated over time in management practices, such as human resources practices. Connor and Becker (1975) emphasized that managerial decision-making is influenced by the values of those involved in the decision-making process.

Values, practices, and work activities tend to be closely connected. For example, if employees keep altruism in high regard, they are more likely to assume that most employees should be concerned about others, in addition to their self-interest. This assumption is likely to influence their work behavior, directing their efforts toward organizational citizenship behavior

and genuine concern for organizational stakeholders. Following from this, the emergence of practices that validate employees' behaviors in which generosity, mutual support, long-term interests, and collective success are more important than short term individual objectives is likely to emerge.

It is likely that individual employees' values can influence and shape effective human resources practices in similar ways all over the world. Prevalent values can enable practices with strong sustainability effects in most organizations. Building upon research of Hofstede (1984), Chinese Culture Connection (1987), and Schwartz (1992), this paper focuses on four indigenous values that have multi-cultural relevance, in order to stimulate the understanding of interactions between values and human resources practices from the international standpoint. As such it investigates effects of altruism, empathy, positive norm of reciprocity, and private self-effacement on the emergence and development of human resources practices. Unlike values considered in the previous research (e.g., Hofstede, 1984), I suggest that these four values are universal, transcend countries and continents, and are culture free in that they are not confined to specific national cultures. In support of this universalistic approach, Smith (1997) suggested that there are deeper level functions and generalizations that remain constant across cultures, which can account for the proposed culture free values. Just as there is widespread cross-cultural agreement on the normative issues of business ethics (Weaver, 2001), certain values are likely to follow suit in an international context.

Human Resources Practices

Human resources are an important determinant of social sustainability. It can add value to the organization and increase the organization's competitiveness and endurance. A 2010 survey published in HR Magazine found that many of the top benefits of sustainability are related to employees and how they perform their jobs (Schramm, 2011). According to this survey, the top four benefits of sustainability include: improved employee morale, more-efficient business processes, stronger public image, and increased employee loyalty.

By influencing how employees work, the effective utilization of human resources is critical to the success of sustainability endeavors in any organization. Research has demonstrated that human resources practices, such as hiring, paying, training, and performance appraisal are extremely valuable (e.g., Pfeffer & Veiga, 1999).

Human resource management literature shows consistent support for the favorable effect of human resources practices, such as: human resources planning and forecasting; succession planning; communication of clear expectations, competencies and goal alignment throughout the organization; consulting with the objective of identifying causes for skill gaps and performance deficiencies; selection techniques; developmental networks and developmental activities including on-boarding and coaching; motivation and leadership development, including authority, responsibility, accountability, and change; recognizing and rewarding talent; and performance management, including feedback and performance appraisal. Bowen and Ostroff (2004) suggested that a strong human resources system can enhance organizational performance, to the degree to which the system promotes those attitudes and behaviors that support the accomplishment of the organizational objectives. Similarly, Collins and Clark (2003) argued in support of the relationship between human resources practices and organizational performance, suggesting that this relationship is mediated through top managers' social networks.

Research in different areas, including economics, psychology, sociology, anthropology and organizational studies tend to converge to the idea that a comprehensive and effective description of the employer-employees relationship requires the consideration of subjective and less-quantifiable factors, in addition to objective and economic factors. These factors have been elaborated in such strings of research as organizational citizenship behavior, and psychological and social contract. For example, Organ (1988) defined the construct of organizational citizenship behavior to include employees' extra-role behaviors, i.e., that are not part of their tasks, such as supporting other employees, volunteering for additional work, or shedding light on their employers' strengths and accomplishments. According to Organ (1988), employees who engage in organizational citizenship behavior may be motivated by courtesy, altruism, sportsmanship, conscientiousness, and civic virtue.

In a different string of research, psychological contract is defined as the employee and employer expectations of the employment relationship that operate over and above the formal contract of employment (Argyris, 1960; Rousseau, 2001). Roehling (1997) emphasized that these expectations are held both consciously, such as expectations about job security, work performance and compensation, and unconsciously, such as expectations about work-life balance. Levinson, Price, Munden, and Solley (1962) drew attention on the dynamic relationship of the psychological contract as a result of changing needs over time, as well as on the perceptual and idiosyncratic nature of the psychological contract, with employees' beliefs about the obligations underlying his or her employment relationship not necessarily shared by the employer. Social contract assumes that individuals voluntarily consent to belonging to an organized entity, with attendant constraints and rights (Schein, 1980). Argyris (1960) used the concept of social contract to refer to an implicit accord between the employees and their

employer. While employee and employer expectations and their implicit accord can be unwritten, they still strongly influence their behavior.

Theoretical Framework

The resource-based theory (Barney (1986) proposes that organizations can generate sustained competitive advantage based on resources that are valuable to those organizations, rare, difficult to imitate, and non-substitutable. These resources consist of "all assets, capabilities, organizational processes, firm attributes, information, knowledge etc. controlled by a firm" (Barney, 1991, p.101) and can be classified into four types: human, financial, informational, and physical or tangible. According to Barney (1991), an organization has a competitive advantage when that organization has the benefit of advanced resource endowments that help it achieve superior performance relative to its competitors, owing to better satisfying customer needs or producing more economically than those competitors. To the degree to which the advanced resource endowments are hard to imitate and non-substitutable, in addition to being valuable and rare, they can help sustain a competitive advantage (Barney, 1991). Factors that can make a resource to be difficult to imitate include: unique historical conditions, causally ambiguous relationship between the resources and competitive advantage, and social complexity of the resources (Armstrong & Shimizu, 2007). A resource is non-substitutable and sustains therefore the organization's competitive advantage if no strategically equivalent resources are available to the competitors (Barney, 1991).

The resource-based view has been used as a theoretical framework in order to explain why human resources practices can favorably influence organizational performance (Wright,

Dunford, & Snell, 2001). This theoretical framework proposes that systems of human resources practices that provide value to the organization, and are frequently unique, causally ambiguous, and hardly imitable build and sustain employee-based capabilities. Lado and Wilson (1994) suggested that these capabilities are difficult to imitate because the practices that built and sustained them may be organization specific, socially complex, and path dependent. Chan, Shaffer, and Snape (2004) emphasized the importance of viewing people as intangible knowledge-based resources and origin of competitive advantage. In order to understand the role of employees in creating a sustained competitive advantage, it is important to shed light on the value-related precursors of human resources practices from organizations. It might be that these values help explain potential mechanisms through which managerial practices can create competitive advantages in a systematic manner.

In addition to the impact of values on human resources practices, I propose that practices that applied consistently reinforce these values, as a result of shaping interpersonal relationships from the organization. Moreover, these human resources practices are reinforced by social sustainability concerns, such that strive for social sustainability will encourage the application of effective human resources practices, as suggested in Figure 1.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Sustainability is a very important issue, seldom explored, of the resource-based theory. Particularly, sustainability of human resources practices is important for understanding how can these practices help organizations achieved a competitive advantage under a competitive

environment, during economic recession. The human side of sustainability has been little studied, even conceptualized, particularly at the organization level. In order to identify human resources practices that can give the organization a competitive advantage, we assess relationships between the factors that drive employees' work behaviors in organizations, focusing specifically on values and effective human resources practices, as well as specific characteristics of these practices – value, rarity, inimitability, and non-substitutability.

Value Triggers of HR Management Practices

Most likely sustainability concerns consider self-interest in addition to altruistic pursuit. The recognition of both these behavioral drivers – altruism and self-interest – may be compatible. It is beneficial for any entity (individual, group, organization, or society) to consider preservation and upholding of resources in unison to its direct and immediate benefit. Consistent with these believes, the Global Institute of Sustainability from Arizona State University defines a sustainable society as one that "considers the interconnectedness of environment, economic, and social systems; reconciles the planet's environmental needs with development needs over the long term; and avoids irreversible commitments that constrain future generations" (retrieved July 18 2009, http://sustainability.asu.edu/about/perspectives.php), whereas Portland State Institute for Sustainable Solutions concentrates, among others, on mechanisms that effect change and foster engagement at the individual, organizational, societal, and ecosystem levels (retrieved December 1 2010, http://www.pdx.edu/sustainability/sustainability-research-areas). From a human resources standpoint, sustainability requires to maintain workforce capabilities and

employee satisfaction through organizational learning, knowledge management practices, and compensation programs.

However, the simultaneous quest for one's individual benefit and general – group, organization or societal – advantage can be precarious to the degree to which they are not aligned. This idea has been clearly underscored by T.S. Elliot who wrote: "the last temptation is the greatest treason: to do the right thing for the wrong reason" (Nobel Lectures, 1969). In a sustainability context, this suggestion is potentiated by the observation that the implementation of new technologies may entail the destruction of some existing businesses. Pointing in a similar direction, research findings on moral hazard (e.g., Florea & Walker, 2009) suggests that the risky pursuit of self-interest can be detrimental to larger entities through the distribution of potential losses to all members of those entities, while potential gains are earmarked exclusively to the risk taker. In the same vein, Base of the Pyramid research (e.g., Hart & London, 2005), suggests the idea that businesses can have a positive social and environmental impact in local communities, and be profitable at the same time. For example, focusing on the poor people as business partners and innovators, rather than just potential producers or consumers can alleviate poverty.

The exploration of potential conflicts of interests between individuals and their group or organization can help decision-makers avoid the *utmost treason* revealed by T.S. Elliot and expand the sustainability research in the area of the value-practice convergence. This paper searches to identify an area of overlap between individual and organizational concerns, between the interests of individuals and their organization and conditions under which human resources practices are effective.

In organizational settings, organizations and individuals, employers and employees are likely motivated by multiple factors, some of them having common ground, which include: *altruism*; *empathy*, defined as the ability to recognize and answer to others' emotional manifestation, which is the engine for building durable relations with others; factors that elicit *reciprocity*; *learning*, developing new skills, and expanding own knowledge; job *security*; *promotion* opportunities; *work itself*; or opportunity to share and experience perennial *values*, such as equity and ethics.

Altruism

Social psychology literature (e.g., Miller, 1999; Cialdini, Brown, Lewis, Luce, & Neuberg, 1997) suggests that the norm of self-interest is overrated, and, in fact, people tend to be more altruistic than they seem or even admit to be. Altruism is discretionary and has the effect of helping another person with an organizationally relevant problem (Organ, 1988). Miller (1999) suggests that the norm of self-interest leads people to act and speak as though they care more about their material self-interest than they do. He further suggests that this image of self-interest leads to the creation of the kinds of social institutions (e.g., workplaces, schools, governments) that transform the image into reality. However, many people are motivated to engage in altruistic pursuits and make these actions appear self-interested. For example, Miller (1999) mentions the tendency to cast even highly pro-social acts in terms of self-interest, when these acts were, in fact, motivated by genuine compassion or kindness. This tendency to conceal noble sentiments under the guise of self-interest may be a cultural characteristic of the Americans, observed by Alexis de Tocqueville over 150 years ago: "Americans... enjoy explaining almost

every act of their lives on the principle of self-interest... I think that in this they often do themselves less than justice, for sometimes in the United States, as elsewhere, one sees people carried away by the ... spontaneous impulses natural to man. But the Americans are hardly prepared to admit that they do give way to emotions of this sort" (Tocqueville, 1969, p. 546).

Starting from this premise, we make the assumption that altruism is more prevalent than assumed. Altruism is in a continuous interplay with self-interest, rather than being overshadowed by self-interest. Therefore, the simultaneous recognition of altruism and self-interest is not only compatible, but also important in assessing human resources practices. Implementing flexible work arrangements is a specific human resources practice that is stimulated not only by pragmatic considerations and self-interest, but also by altruism. Flextime, defined as a scheduling policy in which full-time employees may choose starting and ending times within guidelines specified by the organization (Perry-Smith, 2000). Both self-interest and altruism are likely to characterize this HR practice. This practice is likely to benefit both the employer and organization and create good working relations in the organization. It is likely valuable for the employer who can satisfy out-of-work responsibilities, as well as for the organization that can benefit from more motivated and satisfied employees.

Proposition 1a: The value of altruism stimulates the implementation of flexible work arrangements. While the implementation of flexible work arrangements is substitutable, imitable, and relatively common, this practice is extremely valuable from the perspective of the resource-dependence theory.

Similarly, succession planning and developing critical competencies are likely to be triggered by altruistic concern, in addition to the employer's self-interest to attract, retain, and develop its

future leaders and employees' interest to develop and become more employable. Succession planning, defined as the process of identifying and tracking high-potential employees who will be able to fill top management positions when they become vacant (Rothwell, 2001) searches for employees who continue to show qualities associated with success in top jobs, such as the altruistic willingness to make sacrifices for the organization. Succession planning and developing critical competencies is extremely valuable for both the employee who gains more competencies and the organization that manages more effectively its talent and creates contingencies plans for executive and professional positions.

Proposition 1b: The value of altruism stimulates the implementation of succession planning. The implementation of this human resources practice is substitutable, imitable, and relatively common, but is valuable for most organizations.

Unlike traditional psychological contract that prescribes employees' contributions in the form of time, effort, skills, and loyalty in exchange for job security and opportunities for promotion, the new psychological contract expects employees to take more responsibility for their own careers. As a result, the new psychological contract offers less job security, but more employability, in the form of training and job experiences that ensure that employees can find other employment opportunities (Rousseau, 2001). While self-interest is obvious, the new psychological contract reveals altruism, since employees are willing to assume more career management responsibilities and accept less certainty in exchange for their employment. Employers also invest in employees who may leave the organization and indirectly help other employers who may hire this employees to the degree to which they are satisfied with their employability. The characteristics of the psychological contract developed in any organization are based on trust and specific expectations, and, therefore, hard to imitate. It is also extremely

valuable and hard to substitute through explicit written contracts, potentially giving the organization a distinct competitive advantage.

Proposition 1c: The new psychological contract benefits from altruism. Psychological contract is relatively common, but non-substitutable, inimitable, and valuable from the perspective of the resource-dependence theory.

Altruism is likely to be an important requirement for the engagement in developmental networks and especially for the formation of developmental relationships (Higgins & Kram, 2001). For example, mentoring and giving assistance to new employees during on-boarding functions that require time and effort, without necessarily offering anything back to the mentor or the employee who gives assistance. What matters most in these developmental relationships is to create and maintain durable and generous relationships, and expand and give more consistency to individual social networks. While most participants are likely to benefit from developmental relationships, it is the altruism that drives their engagement in these relationships. This human resources practice would be very difficult to implement in the absence of employees' altruism. They are also extremely important for the development of employees and hard to substitute with other practices that can simultaneously offer the psychological and work-related support offered by developmental networks.

Proposition 1d: Altruism supports the formation of developmental relationships and engagement in developmental networks. Developmental relationships and networks are relatively common and imitable, but non-substitutable and valuable from the perspective of theoretical framework.

It is likely that flextime, succession planning, and developmental relationships, as well as the acceptance of the new psychological contract are favorably influenced by altruism. Altruistic

social partners, including employers and employees are more likely than self-interested social partners to engage in these practices.

Figure 2 displays the human resources practices discussed above and the values that stimulate the engagement in these practices. The figure also displays the resource-based theory's imperatives suggested to be linked to the display of these human resources practices in the presence of the altruism, empathy, positive norm of reciprocity, and private self-effacement.

Empathy

Empathy is the act of perspective taking. Empathic concern is characterized by compassion, tenderness, softheartedness, and sympathy (Cialdini et al., 1997). According to this research, familiarity and similarity can foster attachment to other persons. In turn, attachment promotes perspective taking, wherein one person takes the point of view of others. Alternatively, perspective taking can be brought about by instructions to take the others' perspective. In the same vein, Batson, Sager, Garst, Gank, Rubchinsky, and Dawson (1997) found empirical support for the empathy-helping relationship that is unqualified by group membership. It might be that empathy is a social function – people tend to be empathic because they feel that they should.

To the degree to which empathy is a social function, individuals and organizations can go beyond and above the pursuit of their own interests and help each other. In an organizational environment in which employees are hired based on the same selection procedures and work together, similarity and even familiarity can thrive. According to the empathy model of helping (Batson et. al., 1997), attachment that accompanies similarity and familiarity will develop. As a result, perspective taking can be stimulated in such an organizational environment, either in a

natural manner (i.e., employees helping each other and their employer, employer providing support to its employees) or encouraged through managerial actions, such as jobs design and team working that would require employees to interact frequently or work together.

One specific human resources practice in which perspective taking and empathy are manifested is the communication of clear expectations and goal alignment throughout the organization. In order to help employees understand faster and easier what work behavior they should engage in, it is likely that empathic managers and organizational representatives communicate clear expectations. Communicating clear expectations to employees would also allow them to understand better what performance dimensions they will be evaluated against and adjust their activities and outputs so as to match the organization's goals. Empathic managers and organizational representatives are more likely than others to look at their employees' duties and tasks from the perspective of these employees, to make sure that the employees know exactly what activities and outputs are desired, to observe whether they occur, and to provide feedback to help employees meet expectations (Becker & Klimoski, 1989).

Proposition 2a: Empathy supports, through its perspective-taking component, the communication of clear expectations and goal alignment throughout the organization. These human resources practices are valuable from the perspective of the resource-dependence theory.

Empathy is likely to encourage formation of developmental relationships involving mentoring, assistance received from peers, subordinates, superiors, and others in one's social network (Higgins & Kram, 2001), as well as engagement in developmental networks and developmental activities, including on-boarding and coaching (Noe, 1986). Developmental networks, as subsets of an individual entire social network (Higgins & Kram, 2001), are relevant

to employees' personal and work lives and have multiple benefits for organizational members (Dougherty, Cheung, & Florea, 2008). Most participants are likely to benefit from their engagement in developmental networks. For example, in a mentoring relationship not only the protégée receives professional and psychological support from the mentor, but also the mentor gains access to new ideas.

Proposition 2b: Empathy provides for the formation of developmental relationships and engagement in developmental networks. Developmental relationships and networks are relatively common and imitable, but non-substitutable and valuable from the perspective of the resource-dependence theory.

In the course of providing feedback, managers and employees may identify performance problems and establish ways to resolve these problems. Therefore, empathic employers and employees may be more likely than others to consult each other with the objective of identifying causes for skills gaps and performance deficiencies. These consultations enable the employer to take corrective action, such as training, incentives, or discipline (Antonioni, 1994), and provide employees with developmental feedback and performance appraisal that make them aware of strengths and hindrances, and help eliminate performance deficiencies.

Proposition 2c: Empathy supports the consultation and identification of causes for skills gaps and performance deficiencies. These human resources practices are valuable and non-substitutable from the perspective of the resource-dependence theory.

Empathy is also likely to contribute to the quality of work life and work-life balance. In those organizations where empathy is valued, employees are likely to relate easier to other employees and provide them with support. Organization, as a whole, is likely to include benefits

such as leave policies, child care, elder care, and college assistance (Grover & Crooker, 1995). Support from organization and other employees often have spillover effects in the form of loyalty because employees see the benefits as evidence they are cared for.

Proposition 2d: Empathy contributes to the quality of work life and work-life balance. These human resources practices are valuable from the perspective of the resource-dependence theory.

It is likely that the value and goal congruence between the employer and employee facilitates the communication of clear expectations, consultation, and formation of developmental relationships because both the employer and employee tend to pay attention to the same information, organize and interpret information similarly, and form shared understandings. Meanwhile, employers and employees who communicate effectively, share a common understanding of expectations, consult each other, and engage in developmental networks are likely to establish long-term relationships. The reasons that employers and employees establish these relationships include their tendency to engage in helpful behavior on a regular basis, develop mutually-agreed upon norms that regulate their behavior and collaboration, and benefit from consultation and developmental relationships.

Positive Norm of Reciprocity

To reciprocate means to return in kind. Gouldner (1960) postulated a generalized positive norm of reciprocity, stipulating that people should help those who have helped them and should not harm those who help them. The frequency of reciprocation is directly proportional to the positivity of the norm of reciprocity, in that the more the individuals reciprocate, the more positive the norm of reciprocity is. Empirical evidence suggests that not reciprocating may be

counter-instinctive and thus not likely to occur (Brett, Shapiro, & Lytle, 1998). In the presence of a positive norm of reciprocity, employees are likely to give something in return or feel something mutually.

The new psychological contract is less likely to be broken in the presence of a positive norm of reciprocity because both the employer and employee are likely to fulfill mutual expectations. The lack of a formal contract of employment is not an issue in the presence of a strong tendency to give something in return. In the presence of a positive norm of reciprocity, the psychological contract is valuable from the perspective of resource-dependence theory. The dynamic relationship of the psychological contract as a result of changing needs over time (Levinson et al., 1962) emphasizes its important role in most employment relationship because the continuous substitution with written and formal contracts, every time changes occur, is hard to imagine. Due to its perceptual and idiosyncratic nature, the psychological contract is practically inimitable.

Proposition 3a: The new psychological contract benefits from reciprocity. Psychological contract is relatively common, but non-substitutable, inimitable, and valuable from the perspective of the resource-dependence theory.

A positive norm of reciprocity is likely to encourage formation of developmental relationships and engagement in developmental networks and developmental activities. Especially the assistance received from peers, subordinates, superiors, and others in the employee's social network is likely to benefit from the positive norm of reciprocity. A core concept of developmental relationships is tie strength. Higgins and Kram (2001) define relationship (tie) strength as the level of "emotional affect, reciprocity, and frequency of communication" with those in the developmental network (p. 269). As a result, in part, of

reciprocity, the strength of relationship is likely to favorably influence developmental relationships and networks so as to increase their value and make them non-substitutable.

Proposition 3b: Reciprocity supports the formation of developmental relationships and engagement in developmental networks. Developmental relationships and networks are relatively common and imitable, but non-substitutable and valuable.

Private Self-effacement

Research on attributional styles (e.g., Cai, Sedikides, Gaertner, Wang, Carvallo, Xu, O'Mara, & Eckstein-Jackson, 2011) reveals the common judgmental bias according to which most people tend to regard themselves in more favorable terms than they regard others (e.g., self-serving bias or fundamental attribution error); meanwhile, other people may regard themselves in less favorable terms than they regard others (e.g., modesty bias). The tendency to commit one or the other of these judgmental biases can be tracked on a continuum ranging from self-enhancement or magnification of self that is specific to people who regard themselves extremely favorable to self-effacement. According to Asendorpf and Ostendorf (1998), self-enhancement can be associated to the illusion of unrealistically positive self-evaluations, while self-effacement can be defined as lack of arrogance and inconspicuousness.

Empirical and anecdotal evidence suggests that self-enhancement is more prevalent than self-effacement, at least in individualistic cultures (e.g., Cai et al., 2011). While self-enhancement can take the form of false and fictitious superiority, employees who have moderately favorable beliefs about themselves and feel moderately well-disposed toward themselves, while behaving in moderately confident ways, can be characterized as private self-effacers (Gregg, Hart,

Sedikides, & Kumashiro, 2008). Whether they are private self-effacers or not, public self-effacers tend to overtly express these beliefs and feelings, in a form of behavioral self-presentation, rather than psychological self-evaluation. According to Gregg et al. (2008), private self-effacers tend to be perceived in terms of both underlying humility-honesty and apparent agreeableness. They do not take for granted that they are necessarily special, are sensitive to the importance of each and every employee, genuinely concerned about people around them, and make more objective and realistic assessments, including self-assessment.

At similar skill levels, employees characterized by private self-effacement are likely to benefit to a larger degree from strong-tie developmental relationships that are wider in range than employees who regard their capabilities well-above average. Benefits of these developmental relationships may include considerable interdependence, interaction, and motivation to offer and receive support from mentors, superiors, peers, subordinates, other organizational and, potentially, non-organizational members. Employees characterized by private self-effacement are likely to be included in entrepreneurial developmental networks (Higgins & Kram, 2001). As a result, in part, of reciprocity, the strength of relationship favorably influences developmental relationships and networks through increased value and non-substitutability.

Proposition 4a: Private self-effacement stimulates the formation of developmental relationships and engagement in developmental networks. These developmental relationships are relatively common and imitable, but non-substitutable and valuable.

Private-self-effacement employees are likely to focus on their own behaviors, rather than others', to attribute failure to internal factors, and find solutions to problems rather than placing blame on others. Moreover, private-self-effacement employees are likely to interact and consult

with other organizational members. Therefore, they may identify performance problems faster and easier and find solutions for these problems. Rather than blaming factors outside their control, private-self-effacement employees tend to focus on factors that are under their control, such as: learning, making corrections, developing skills, and improving work performance.

Proposition 4b: Self-effacement leads to faster and easier identification of causes for skills gaps and performance deficiencies. The identification of these causes is valuable and non-substitutable from the perspective of the resource-dependence theory.

Private self-effacement is also likely to contribute to the quality of work life and work-life balance. Private-self-effacement employees may be more motivated to introspection and addressing both work and life challenges. They are more likely to search for solutions than to let problems to be solved by others. Therefore, they would be pro-active solution-finders rather than trouble-makers in their organizations.

Proposition 4c: Private self-effacement boosts the quality of work life and work-life balance. These human resources practices are valuable from the perspective of the theoretical framework.

Insert Figure 2 about here

Conclusions

This paper assess the relationship between four values – altruism, empathy, positive norm of reciprocity, and private self-effacement – and seven human resources practices, in relation to a resource-based theoretical framework that guides their implementation. The premise of this

paper is that the nurturing of certain values among employees of an organization will support the implementation of sustainable HR management practices in that organization, which, in turn, will contribute to the attainment of the "social" part of the organization's sustainability goals. The employees' values influence the sustainability of human resources practices. The propositions elaborated in this conceptual paper provide important insight into a relatively unexplored area of the social sustainability literature.

Implications

The current paper is conceptual in that it explores relationships between values and human resources practices, in order to identify sustainable practices that can give the organization a competitive advantage. This conceptual paper contributes to the management and sustainability literatures by building upon social psychology literature to identify values that are likely to stimulate the implementation of effective human resources practices. The findings of this paper suggest that human resources practices have an impact on social sustainability, therefore extending the focus of previous work on sustainability.

By identifying different values and relating them to effective human resources practices this paper helps to unravel values that promote sustainability. As such, this paper has not only theoretical, but significant practical implications helping human resources managers to singularize and address potential factors that promote social sustainability. Furthermore, by linking values to different human resources practices, this paper contribute to the human resources literature, by exploring how organizations can design and implement these practices more effectively and what values increase the sustainability of these practices. Moreover, this

paper addresses an imperative in today's interconnected world, as recognized by Aguinis and Henle (2003): it identifies universal values that have multi-cultural relevance.

Human resources and sustainability research could try to identify additional values that address social sustainability. This paper suggests that both the employer and employees play important roles in promoting sustainability. Through the selection and promotion of employees with the desired values, and through the power of positive example, the implementation of effective human resources practices can have effects above and beyond the organization boundaries, influencing other organizations.

Starting from the suggestion of this paper, human resources managers, as well as other managers, can take concrete steps in promoting sustainability in their organizations. For example, they can promote empathy by making significant differences through personal example. As soon as most employees are consciously motivated to be empathic, it is likely that empathy becomes self-reinforcing because it answers to an important human need: the need to build durable relationships. Sustainability of human resources practices is important for the organization's capability to thrive, while contributing to the development of the society. As such, these practices guide both organizational behavior and decision-making, and societal expectations.

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Figure 1 – General Model

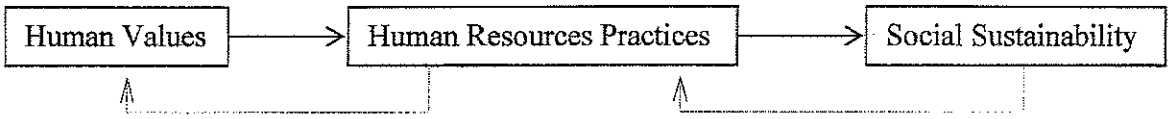

Figure 2 – Human values and motivations relevant to effective human resources practices

Human Capital Activities (Human Resources Practices)	Resource-based imperative	Values
Succession planning and developing critical competencies	valuable	• Altruism
Communication of clear expectations and goal alignment throughout the organization	valuable	• Empathy
Flexible work arrangements	valuable	• Altruism
Developmental networks and developmental activities including on-boarding and coaching	non-substitutable valuable	• Altruism • Empathy • Reciprocity • Self-effacement
Consulting with the objective of identifying causes for skill gaps and performance deficiencies	non-substitutable valuable	• Empathy • Self-effacement
New psychological contract with an accent on employability	non-substitutable inimitable valuable	• Altruism • Reciprocity
Quality of life and work-life balance	valuable	• Empathy • Self-effacement