

COMMITTED EMPLOYEES - INNOVATIVE COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE OF MINING COMPANIES

Boryana Trifonova

University of Mining and Geology "St. Ivan Rilski", 1700 Sofia; E-mail: boriana_trifonova@abv.bg

ABSTRACT. The awareness of the need for committed employees is the first step toward effective motivation of human resources in an organization. The work of committed employees is of higher quality, they work with passion, initiative and their goals are identical with the common goals. These are the people thanks to whom development is achieved, new practices are introduced, and they are a source of innovations. Under the conditions of the current crisis, it would be difficult for companies to cope in the global competitive environment, if they are not oriented to talent retention and investment in the commitment of their human resources. The purpose of the present report is to prove the essential role of employee commitment as an innovative competitive advantage in the conditions of a crisis. Showing good practices for the commitment of human resources, applicable in the mineral resources sector, provide guidance for the companies in that industry on how to succeed in this unsafe situation. Truly, the success of a company is due to the inspired people working for it.

Keywords: committed employees, innovations, competition, mining companies

АНГАЖИРАНИТЕ СЛУЖИТЕЛИ – ИНОВАТИВНО КОНКУРЕНТНО ПРЕДИМСТВО НА МИННИТЕ КОМПАНИИ

Боряна Трифонова

Минно-геоложки университет „Св. Иван Рилски“, 1700 София

РЕЗЮМЕ. Осъзнаването на необходимостта от ангажирани служители е първата стъпка към ефективното мотивиране на човешките ресурси в една организация. Ангажираните служители работят по-качествено и със страст, инициативни са и техните цели съвпадат с общите цели. Това са хората, благодарение на които се постига развитие, въвеждат се нови практики и са източник на иновации. В условията на настоящата криза, компаниите които не са ориентирани към задържане на таланта и инвестиране в човешки ресурси в посока тяхната ангажираност, трудно биха се справили в глобалната конкурентна среда. Целта на настоящият доклад е да изведе водещото значение на ангажираността на служителите като иновативно конкурентно предимство в условията на криза. Посочването на добри практики за ангажираност на човешките ресурси, приложими в минерално-суровинния сектор, дава насоки на компаниите от този бранш за успех в тази несигурна обстановка. Именно, успехът на една компания се дължи на вдъхновените хора, работещи за нея.

Ключови думи: ангажирани служители, иновации, конкуренция, минни компании

Introduction

The awareness of the need for committed employees is the first step toward effective motivation of human resources in an organization. The work of committed employees is of higher quality, they work with passion, initiative and their goals are identical with the common goals. These are the people thanks to whom development is achieved, new practices are introduced, and they are a source of innovations. Under the conditions of the current crisis, it would be difficult for companies to cope in the global competitive environment, if they are not oriented to talent retention and investment in the commitment of their human resources.

The purpose of the present report is to prove the essential role of employee commitment as an innovative competitive advantage under the conditions of a crisis. As a result of the single conducted national study of employee commitment in the information technology sector, five basic factors were established for achieving commitment. (Audit Advice Associates, 2015) The examples for the use of these factors for human resources management in mining Companies have been popularized in company and industry periodicals.

Showing good practices for the commitment of human resources which are applicable in the minerals and raw materials sector provides guidance for the companies in that industry to succeed in this unsafe situation.

1. Basic factors for achieving commitment

The main challenge and responsibility of company management is to increase employee commitment as a guarantee for success when getting out of the current crisis. Commitment is a state that can be achieved as a result of the impact of diverse interdependent factors in combination with age, cultural and regional characteristics. The following five can be enumerated as factors for achieving commitment: leadership, recognition, providing opportunities, knowledge management and communication. (The single study of 18 commitment factors was used, conducted in Bulgaria in 2015, Audit Advice Associates, 2015) The enumerated factors impact employees in different ways. They can improve the work environment and social relations when they are tied to the goals and guidelines for company development.

• **Leadership** - the management of the company is inseparably linked to people's work. Leadership is intrinsic to the behavior of the leader, consolidating the efforts and capabilities of employees for the achievement of the organization's goals. It includes the distinctive qualities of the person accomplishing the impact over the team. In order to be a leader, a person needs to stand out with high social status and with impact on the behavior of others. But leadership should not be associated with the personal qualities and motivation of the leader only. More important is the established relationship system of the team, including the initiative shown and the responsibility taken by the leader for the team's actions. From this point of view, companies need to analyze the preparedness of individual employees to be leaders and offer them the respective training for their development in this direction.

• **Recognition** - this is an act of respect and an award for the long-term efforts of each member of the team. Recognition is most often achieved through compensation and bonuses, but only if there is a fair and transparent system for performance evaluation in force. Most often these stimuli are insufficient to achieve the desired employee commitment. In addition to them, it is necessary to express respect, gratitude and praise for work well done. In this manner, deep and lasting sense of ownership and belonging are created in the employee with respect to the organization that recognized his contribution.

• **Providing opportunities** - assistance for the career growth of individual employees involves creating clear rules for climbing the hierarchy and respect for efforts. As a result of encouragement and initiative and self-organizing, responsibility, innovativeness and continuity are achieved in the work of the team. This is a possibility for organizations to achieve long-term success, relying on the deployed managerial and organizing potential of their employees.

• **Knowledge management** - in the modern technologically changing world the manner in which organizations manage knowledge both at the individual and at the group level is of crucial importance for their competitiveness. Knowledge management is a modern approach for collecting, entering, processing, sharing and analyzing the information existing within, and outside of, the organization. This factor is of the highest importance for employee commitment, due to the fact that today we witness very fast obsolescence of personnel knowledge and skills. The organization must be ready to invest in the training of its employees, but also to inspire them to obtain new knowledge and skills to apply them at work. Committed employees who realize that knowledge is capital and a competitive advantage can assist their organizations not only in their survival in times of crisis, but also in their future evolution.

• **Communication** - the connecting process, important for the management of any organization. With the help of communication, the behavior of human resources is modified in the name of the changes implemented and goals achieved. Communication is a bilateral process and employee feedback to management is of significant importance for the effectiveness of the organization. As a result of more frequent conversations with employees, interpersonal conflicts and problems can be detected on time. Open, timely and honest communication which builds trust in management and

managerial decisions is of crucial importance for employee commitment.

The impartiality of the analysis of factors for the achievement of commitment requires to underscore that their use in human resources management is different. Despite its innovativeness, their combination and application cannot be taken as a cure-all for any problems related to this key process for business organizations. The increasing employee commitment is a possibility for development based on innovative latest practices. When employees are bound to the goals and guidelines for development, they help to establish a good work atmosphere, especially under the conditions of a need for continuous changes at all levels. It is a fact that in the current economic conditions the growth and evolution of a company are directly related to innovations, therefore, employee commitment is a suitable method for the purpose. (Galabova, B., B. Trifonova. 2018).

2. Good practices in the companies in the minerals and raw materials sector

In the contemporary Bulgarian practice different examples are found for applying employee commitment factors. They are present in many enterprises of the minerals and raw materials industry where significant results have been achieved. Different combinations of factors are possible related to their adaptation to the conditions in the company itself and the specific needs and goals. The advantages of their adequate and timely implementation lead to visible and measurable effects.

Achieving commitment in the companies of the minerals and raw materials sector represents an innovative solution for systematic discovery and exploitation of the possibilities and opportunities internal to the company. The following are good practices for retaining key employees used by the companies in this industry: trainings and development programs, involvement in interesting and challenging projects, praise, recognition of possibilities and career growth, as well as social benefits. In leading mining companies, examples can be shown of the implementation of diverse initiatives from the ones listed:

• Training and career development

Employees in leading mining companies periodically participate in specialized trainings embedded in the companies' programs for training activity. Companies have at their disposal their own professional training centers which organize the trainings which in the current crisis are remote. In addition to them, trainings and workshops are organized for the acquisition of new knowledge and skills and to improve employee qualification. They are delivered in partnership with the largest technical universities in the country. These trainings contribute for good results when achieving company goals, for improving work quality and productivity.

The possibilities for career growth offered by companies are highly valued by employees. A good practice in these companies is when those who have proven to be good at their job raise in the hierarchy. This happens after direct monitoring on the part of management, systematic recording of achieved high results with developed internal training programs for the training and development of leadership skills. The possibilities

for growth in the hierarchy motivate employees to such a degree that they invest efforts and resources in order to preserve this trend and strive to climb the career ladder. In addition, external coaching specialists are hired for the professional development of managers.

• **Providing possibilities and inclusion in Project**

The projects which Bulgarian Network develops, especially "I am proud of my parents' work" and "Profession bazaar", provide direct benefits for mining companies and show how much mining production has changed in the last years and are in keeping with our transparency with respect to society, employees and media. (News, Mining and Geology journal. 2020) Thanks to them, new technologies, automation, investments in environmental preservation in the minerals and raw materials sectors are popularized. By involving employees in the projects, the sense is created that the work performed is exciting, challenging and interesting. In practice, when implementing the projects, the management of each company direct their efforts towards redesigning jobs and work places which gives satisfaction to the personnel.

The following are projects directed towards the people working in the industry and with guaranteed benefits for society and regions: "Business achievements for social entrepreneurship" and "Employment for unemployed young women in regions with heavy industry". They are directed toward business skill training and providing opportunities to develop entrepreneurship and involve women in the active economic life. (Project of Industrial Cluster Srednogie, 2020) The commitment of employees and their inclusion in company goals is also related to company activities for the preservation of national traditions and of the Bulgarian heritage. A related project of mining companies is "Bulgarian school", thanks to which a private school and a kindergarten are operating which preserve the Bulgarian Revival traditions. The "Biodiversity monitoring plan" takes the endangered protected plant and animal species, observes them, draws a plan for their preservation and includes the recultivation of areas where the activity has already finished. Under the project for "Preservation of the cultural heritage", archaeological explorations and excavations were carried out in the regions with mining activities, so as to preserve the Bulgarian heritage for future generations. (Dundee Precious Metals, 2012)

Today, business has a continuously increasing importance for the sustainability of society. The lessons from the crisis which we should follow are that society requires a much higher level of commitment, solidarity, and responsibility. It is necessary to increase employee commitment to overcome difficulties, including observing corporate culture. Ethical firms will be the most attractive ones in the future, not only as employers, but also as business partners. (News, Mining and Geology journal. 2020)

• **Effective communication, praise, appreciation**

This factor has a strong impact on the results of the individual activity of employees. When a person finishes work, he expects recognition for his merits. Expects to be noticed and appreciated. The lack of appreciation by the boss causes the worker to feel that, since he was not noticed and appreciated for work, this will not happen. In mining companies where a large part of work positions are related to specific knowledge, skills and competence and other positions also

with a health risk, managers aim to evaluate workers fairly and decrease the level of de-motivation.

Commitment reflects the feelings and behavior of employees caused by their ties and relations with the company. With time, mining companies have created a reward system (for example "Best in the profession") and this causes employees to strongly wish to prove themselves, which explains the very high degree of commitment. To some degree, this factor creates a competitive atmosphere with the purpose each employee to give the best he can and, as a result of this, apart from material incentives, a sense of one's importance and value will be generated.

• **Leadership**

It is good leadership of a company when the goal is to inspire and inflame the entire personnel. To build trust in management, managerial staff demonstrates before the personnel with confidence that it knows where the company is going, that it has developed good plans for the future and, on its part, it is capable of fulfilling them. Something positive in leading mining companies is the endeavor to master behavioral skills for holding conversations and negotiations, for making individual and group decisions. Examples of targeted improvement of firm culture in the industry exist since 1996 already. Programs for the stimulation of creative activity and encouragement of good work and new relevant ideas and proposals are developed and constantly updated. (Tsotsorkov, L. 1996)

The initiative "Let use work together" targets building the desired firm culture, aiming to deploy employee commitment and unused potential. (Bulgarian Chamber of Mining and Geology /BCMG/, 2019) This project applies the theory of systemic leadership, including the creation of a work environment in which teams willingly give the best they can. Employees from all levels in the company participate in the initiative with the goal to feel more responsible with respect to the commitments they make and the behavior they display. Specific training is conducted by means of adapted materials revised for the needs of the personnel. A cartoon film was created which includes illustrative situations from the real work environment, seen from the point of view of systemic leadership models. Employees of the company with different main professions are in the role of trainers. This helps to create an environment of trust, openness, understanding and reciprocity between the participants and facilitates perception.

• **Social benefits**

Social benefits are a sign of social status for employees of mining companies. Taking them away would not only lead to a very high degree of de-motivation, but also to a sense of offense, lowering of the social status. The majority of employees in mining companies believe that respect for employee rights, fair salaries and safe work conditions are most frequently found on the part of a "responsible" employer. (Petrova, V. 2016)

Leading mining companies develop their social policy to a very high level. With time, they upgrade this policy trying to satisfy most needs of separate individuals and of the group as a whole (the entire personnel). Examples of social benefits are: the dining facilities, a medical facility to provide emergency aid in the case of incidents, providing parking lots for the personal cars of employees and for managers. In addition, employees are provided with: cards with 20% discount for SPA services,

shopping coupons for specific store chains, possibilities to improve qualifications, participation in different workshops, additional pension and health insurance. The main purpose of the social policy of the company is not only personnel retention, but also getting their loyalty. In turn, employees get opportunities to satisfy their immaterial and material needs, to feel social, not just workers.

It is possible to point at a number of examples for express responsibility of leading mining companies for the human resources working there. The stress is placed on applying a policy for preserving the health of all workers. In addition to the provided safety measures for mechanical devices and machines, the installation of safety railing and barriers, letting in only after and alcohol test, weekly safety meetings, trainings for healthy and safe work conditions and for work with biological agents, annual preventive medical checks are provided for all hired employees.

The management of mining companies strive to retain their key employees which is also reflected in the implementation of an intelligent system for quality management, environmental protection and work health and safety. It allows the instructions and rules for safe work to be subject of continuous control, periodic audits and ongoing evaluation of the possibilities for improvement. The following are examples of good practices in relation to the integrated system, implemented and applied at the corporate level: (Serous 7) seven activities and operations evaluated with highest risk, (Take 5) five steps for the safety of each work place, company Work Conditions Committee, manager visits for safety, safe barometer, Safety Day and a health campaign to quit smoking. (Bulgarian Chamber of Mining and Geology /BCMG/, 2019)

The high economic performance is related to significant capital investments in modern technologies and to investments in upskilling of employees (Galabova, Nestorov, 2019). The continuous improvement of work health and safety conditions and of the unfavorable impact on the environment after mining and extraction activities is the foundation of the sustainable development of mining companies. It is the main priority of the management of mining companies. It helps to build a sense of belonging in employees. This sense makes people identify with the organization and strengthens commitment even more.

Conclusion

The impartiality of the analysis of factors for the achievement of commitment requires to underscore that their use in human resources management is different. Despite its innovativeness, their combination and application cannot be taken as a cure-all for any and all problems related to this key process for business organizations. Achieving commitment in the enterprises of the minerals and raw materials sector represents an innovative solution for the systematic discovery and

exploitation of the conditions and possibilities internal to the firm. Good practices for the retention of key employees used in enterprises from this industry are the following: trainings and development programs, inclusion in interesting and challenging projects, praise, recognition of possibilities and career growth, as well as social benefits.

The goal of mining companies is to create competitive advantage by supporting their strong technical and commercial performance with expert management of social processes. This includes building a work environment in which teams willingly give their best. And this, on its part, unlocks the potential of employees, encourages their creativity, leads to increased productivity and better business performance. It is necessary to deploy the internal process of organizational development which, by means of a system of qualifying and stimulus measures, will lead to improvement of the management of human resources in these companies.

References

- Audit Advice Associates, 2015, Osnovni faktori za angajiranostta na slujitelite v ikt, https://computerworld.bg/it_liders/2015/10/23/3464164_osnovni_faktori_za_angajiranostta_na_slujitelite_v_ikt/ (in Bulgarian).
- Bulgarian Chamber of Mining and Geology/BCMG/, 2019, Annual reports the mineral raw material industry in Bulgaria, 63p.
- Dundee Precious Metals, 2012, Sustainability report of "Dundee Precious Metals" JSC, 56p.
- Galabova, B., N. Nestorov. 2019, Role of the mining industry in the Bulgarian economy, Mining and Geology journal, number.5, p.18-24. (in Bulgarian with English abstract).
- Galabova, B., B. Trifonova. 2018, Innovative practices in the management of the mining company, Journal of mining and geological sciences, Vol. 61, Part IV, Humanitarian Sciences and Economics, p.25-28.
- News, 2020, Bulgarska sesia na svetoven forum "Recover better, recover stronger, recover together", Mining and Geology journal, number.4-5, p.4-5 (in Bulgarian).
- Petrova, V. 2016, The impact of corporate social responsibility on employees in the mining industry, Annual of the UMG "St. Ivan Rilski", Vol. 59, Part IV, Humanitarian Sciences and Economics, p.40-42 (in Bulgarian with English abstract).
- Project of Industrial Cluster Srednogorie, 2020, <http://www.srednogorie.eu>
- Tsotsorkov, L.1996, Osnovi na firmenata kultura v MOK Asarel-Medet AD Panagyurishte, Sofia, 315p. (in Bulgarian).