

**The main objective of the project** is to determine the impact of the company's internal and **external social capital** on developing **genuine engagement of employees** in sustainable development projects. The result of the project will make up the reference model for shaping employee engagement in undertaking **sustainable development**.

There is an increasingly urgent need to integrate business into sustainable development, which is understood here as combining economic, social and environmental goals in the process of meeting the needs of future generations. Economic goals mean achieving long-term growth in which all social groups will be involved. Environmental goals focus on environmental protection and the management of natural resources in a way that will enable them to preserve for future generations. Social goals, on the other hand, relate to a sustainable improvement in the quality of life of the present and future generations.

The concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR), which is popular in business theory and practice, is increasingly being questioned, largely due to its mostly superficial nature and the lack of genuine involvement in its implementation by businesses. For example, cases such as the practice of the so-called 'greenwashing' are well-known to the public. Nonetheless, these are companies that affect not only economic development, but also the quality of life in society and the condition of the natural environment.

Man plays a key role in the effective realization of the goals of sustainable development, therefore, without changing human behaviours in the consumer, corporate, institutional, and social dimensions it is impossible to reach them. With regard to businesses, this means that the fundamental prerequisite for **authentic engagement in sustainable development** is changing the attitudes and values of employees towards their **genuine engagement in sustainable development projects**. One of the main assumptions of the project is that this engagement can be stimulated by **external (inter-organizational) relationships**.

Although the issue of sustainable development is dealt with by many researchers, the knowledge of it in the science of management is still **largely normative** and many **assumptions remain empirically unconfirmed**. There is, therefore, a need for doing research into the essence, mechanisms, and conditions of sustainable development in companies.

**Originality of the problem** described in the project also stems from the fact that it assumes the use of the concepts that have not been used together in one research model yet. These are as follows:

- 1) **the Social Capital model** that takes into account the following dimensions: structural - relational - cognitive (SRC);
- 2) **the ARA model** (actors - resources - activities) that describes inter-organizational relationships; according to this model, the relationship is the result of the interaction process, where the actors (*i.e.* employees representing organizations) engage in (technical, administrative, commercial, *etc.*) activities and engage the needed resources (technology, material, knowledge, *etc.*) in order to solve common problems and seize the opportunities;
- 3) **the Work Engagement model** (here: the engagement in sustainable development projects);
- 4) **the PSC model** (Positive Social Change) will be used to examine the authenticity of employee engagement in the implementation of the company's sustainable development concept. The PSC model assumes two levels: (1) a superficial positive social change and (2) a profound positive social change. Only the second one is lasting in nature and is possible due to the true internal transformation and the involvement of change objects (employees);
- 5) **the MCO mechanism** (motivation - capabilities - opportunities) is used to study the changing behaviour of employees who express positive social change (PSC). In organizational practice, the PSC mechanisms are launched through projects that emphasize the three mentioned elements (the so-called 'levers').

Bonds between **the actors of the relationship are crucial** and depend on the quality of relationships between organizations. Bonds between actors create the external social capital of an organization, and it is of particular importance to share common values with regard to social, environmental and economic goals, from the point of view of joint development by sustainable development organizations. In turn, **the organization's internal social capital**, in particular the trust of its employees in the management and positive relationships among employees, are the key determinants of a profound positive social change in the organization, meaning genuine engagement of employees in achieving sustainable development goals.

The purpose of the project will be realized through the use of different **qualitative methods, supported by quantitative methods**. They will be used in the measurements carried out among companies operating in Poland declaring the implementation of projects related to sustainable development. Research steps include desk research, in-depth individual interviews (IDIs), focus group interviews (FGIs), ethnographic research, analysis of texts (documents) and quantitative research CATI using a questionnaire based on the results of qualitative research. Part of the project will be implemented in foreign companies (Finnish companies) within the agreement concluded with the University of Oulu. Finland occupies a high place in the sustainable development rankings, thus comparing experiences from both countries will allow developing a high quality reference model. This is important in terms of the possibility of **using the results of the project in the practice of Polish companies**.