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CONSCIOUS OR INDIFFERENT - CONCERNS ON DIGITALIZATION AND SUSTAINABILITY OF THE MILITARY HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

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Abstract: *University sustainability is a topical concept, which tries through complex approaches regarding the integration of the valences of the economic - social - environment, to create a new strategic model of adapting the organization to the environment and to a context characterized by change, dynamism, and innovation. Achieving sustainability at university level involves identifying methods and tools to underpin development strategies and through which the objectives specific to the functioning of each organization can be achieved. In an era marked by the intensification of the use of technology and digitalization of systems and processes used at the organization level, the question arises about the opportunity of digitizing them as a prospect of achieving sustainability at the organization level. Starting from this reality, the present paper aims to identify the extent to which at the level of a military university the valences of sustainability are known and harnessed in the processes taking place at its level. In this regard, a quantitative analysis was conducted, based on the completion of a questionnaire, which aimed to assess the perception of students who are studying at the bachelor programs organized at "Nicolae Bălcescu" Land Forces Academy in Sibiu, regarding sustainability and digitalization at the level of the organization.*

Keywords: sustainability, digitalization, military academia, digital human resource.

1. Introduction

Sustainability analysis at the level of university educational institutions is a topical concern both at national and international level. The focus in this direction is justified by the importance that the human resource plays in the implementation of sustainable processes at the level of organization or economic activity, as well as in the design of strategies aimed at ensuring the achievement of the objectives subordinated to the concept of sustainability. The successive integration of the three valences: economic - social - environment at the level of the functional structures of an organization depends to a large extent on the capacity of the human resource involved in understanding, applying, developing and harnessing the principles of sustainability. Achieving sustainability requires a deeper approach to how it is implemented and places education at the heart of the global sustainable development strategy, the 2023

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Agenda [1]. Thus, one cannot talk about sustainability without providing adequate professional training of the human resource that can respond to challenges and opportunities that sustainability brings. Universities have a particularly important role in the formation of competences, skills and visions for human resources, which is why many researchers, in recent years, have focused their attention on the foundation of a framework to address sustainability at the university level. According to some of them [2], the sustainability of a university should be debated from the perspective of three directions, namely: the development of relevant knowledge, developing the skills of students, representing the future of the workforce, and developing institutional capacity to meet the needs of the first two directions. Another realistic approach to the key role of human resources concerns the education for sustainable development offered by higher education, which is vital in the global strategy of sustainable transformation of society. Thus, education shapes the social and professional behaviors of young people, with a direct and long-term impact on society and the environment [3]. Regarding these aspects, it is particularly important to pay attention to the management of human resources, and to form a sustainable workforce; first of all, teachers, instructors and specialists must be trained and conducted to face the opportunity to develop in this direction. Only institutions that offer the opportunity to develop and use these skills will be able to shape their knowledge, skills and student value systems [4]. The achievement of such objectives aimed at both the trainer and the graduate of a sustainable university education institution involves a framework of analysis complex. Thus, the application of sustainability management within higher education institutions becomes a necessity of modern universities, of competitive universities focused on sustainability principles, capitalizing on the principles of postmodern education [5]. But the extent to which the parties involved in the university educational process are aware of, use and assimilate the necessity and importance of learning competences and aptitudes in this direction, was not sufficiently analyzed to be able to establish clear strategies and directions of action that would contribute to assuming the principles of sustainability as objectives necessary for development and the integration of individuals into a sustainable society. The need to implement sustainability processes is a pressing reality, and the main challenge is to identify the main tools to facilitate and ensure success of these actions. In a continuous exposure to technology and information systems, digitalization is shaping up as a valuable tool for achieving sustainability objectives. The flow of digital education is essential, from the processes that take place at the classroom level, through the use of software and applications, the provision of digital materials and the development of topics using various platforms, up to the taking of exams and the communication of learning outcomes [6]. In a context marked by numerous challenges regarding the adaptability of economic, educational and managerial systems to a digital infrastructure, which would support sustainable development at the organizational level as well, the events of recent years bring to the fore the transfer of these perspectives to the military organization as well [7].

2. Methods and tools of analysis

Considering the special role played by the sustainable university in achieving sustainable economic and social objectives, as evidenced by brief foray into the literature presented above, this paper aims to identify the extent to which, at the level of a military institution of higher education, the valences of sustainability are known and capitalized in the processes that take place at its level. In this regard, a quantitative analysis was performed, based on the completion of a questionnaire containing a

number of 16 questions of the evaluation scale type, matrices with single or multiple answers, which aimed to evaluate the perception of the students who are studying in the programs bachelor's degree organized at the level of the "Nicolae Bălcescu" Land Forces Academy of Sibiu, regarding sustainability and digitalization at the level of the organization. The period allocated for completing the on-line questionnaire was 15.03-15.04.2023, and the target group was the students enrolled in the bachelor's programs organized at the academy level from all 3 years of studies. A number of 134 students responded to this questionnaire belonging to the following bachelor's study programs: Public administration, Accounting and management information, Economic-financial management, Organizational management, Engineering and management in the field of military communications, Military leadership.

3. Analysis of students' perception of the concepts of sustainability and digitalization

Students answered questions designed to reveal the degree to which they are familiar with these two concepts and with important cross-cutting elements within these two processes. It highlights the students' opinions on the need to implement digitalization in any organization and its interdependence with sustainability (Figure 1). Also, the answers show that students know to a small extent the meaning of these two concepts, and further additions are needed to understand their full implications. From the point of view of the possibilities offered by the institution, the students admit that there are multiple opportunities to get involved in actions that have digitization components, but also sustainability. The awareness of the existence of these opportunities correlated with the lack of knowledge of the concepts reveals syncope to the extent that they are willing to involve themselves in activities related to the act of learning.

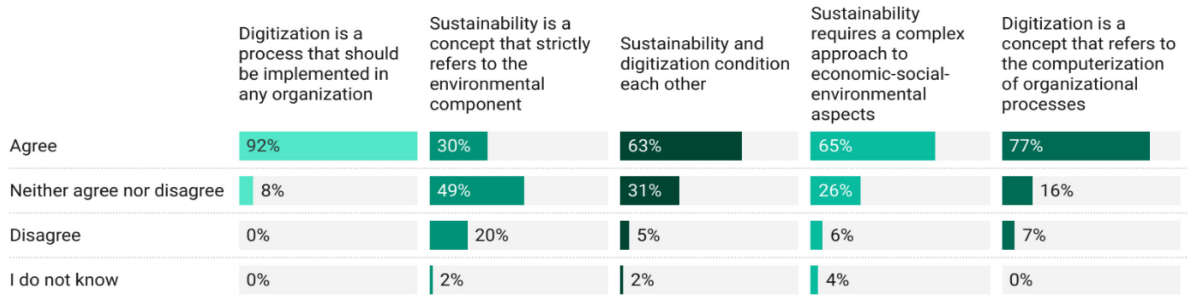


Figure 1: General perceptions of sustainability and digitalization

From the point of view of knowledge of relevant concepts in the context of the present times, in which the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the increase of the degree of digitization are desirable of any organization, regardless of size or field of activity, the research has revealed conceptually interesting associations. For example, the concepts most debated by students refer to human rights, health and well-being (Figure 2). At the opposite pole, there are the concepts that are less known and debated that refer to diversity biological and nature, climate change, ecosystems and ecological principles. Sustainability and digitalization are increasingly up to date in economic systems, so merging them and acquiring them early is the goal of any organization. There will be no sustainability without digitalization, and an organization's ability to quickly integrate new technologies will be its competitive advantage in the market. That is why it is important that the future human resources of organizations, current students, know and use the information for the benefit of organizations.

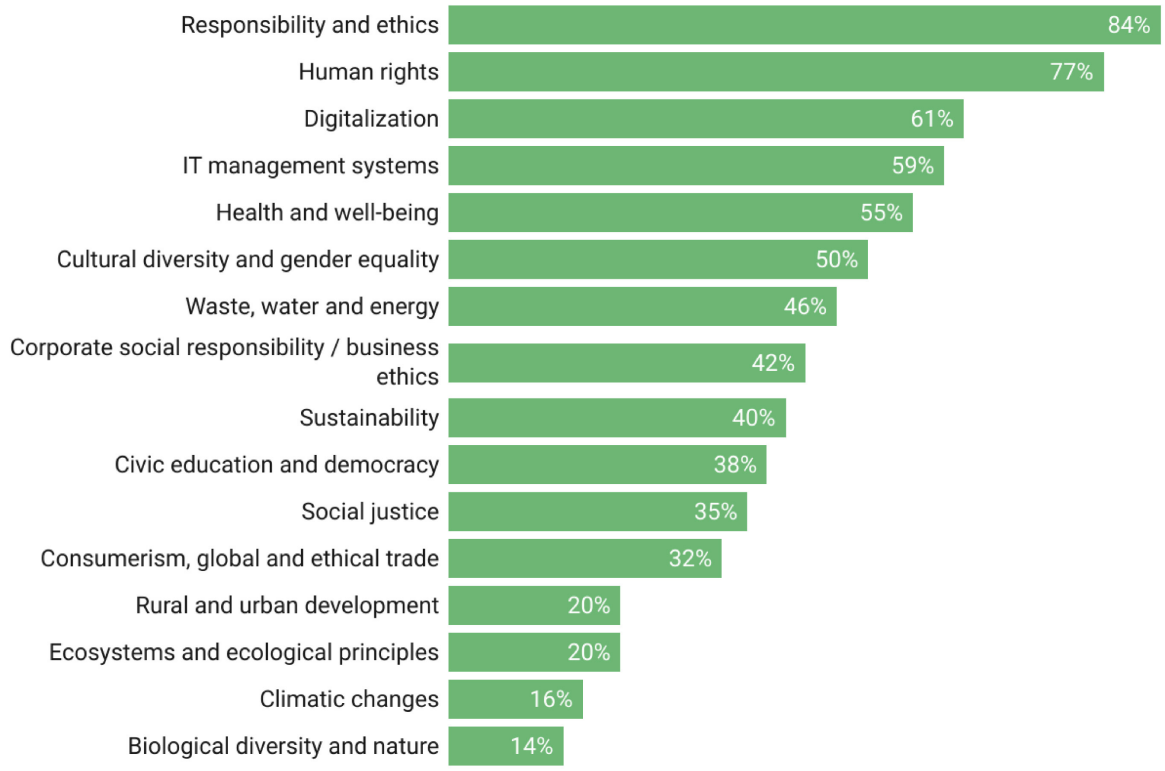


Figure 2: The main concepts known to students associated with sustainability

In the near future, digitalization will not be just about connecting people through technology. Organizations will integrate sensors, interactions with robots and artificial intelligence, which will generate even greater distancing from today's traditional organizations. Students need to be prepared for these changes. Fortunately, most respondents are ready to improve their professional outcomes through digitalization. To a significantly small extent they consider themselves ready to implement a sustainability model (Figure 3) which reinforces the need to emphasize knowledge in this domain.

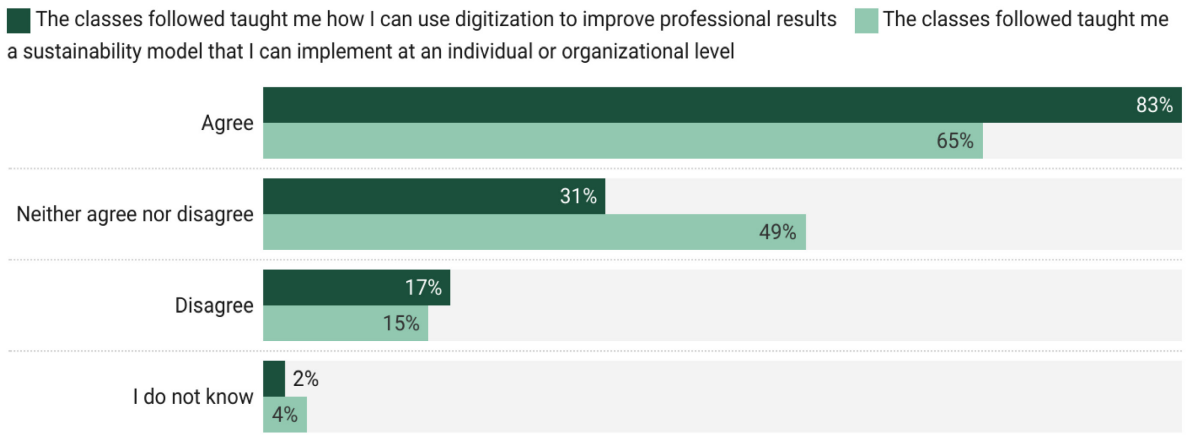


Figure 3: Applicability of learned notions

To ensure success in the future, the education system must provide at least 3 essential elements for students: creativity, critical capacity, resilience. From their

point of view, the most important characteristics are adaptability, innovation and vision (Figure 4). Jobs will require human resources centered on problem solving, effective analysis of information and decision-making in a visionary way. Recognizing the importance of these skills represents awareness of the fact that will later lead to steps to acquire them. Today's students need to be aware of the importance of transferable skills in achieving performance at both the individual and synergistic, at the organizational level.

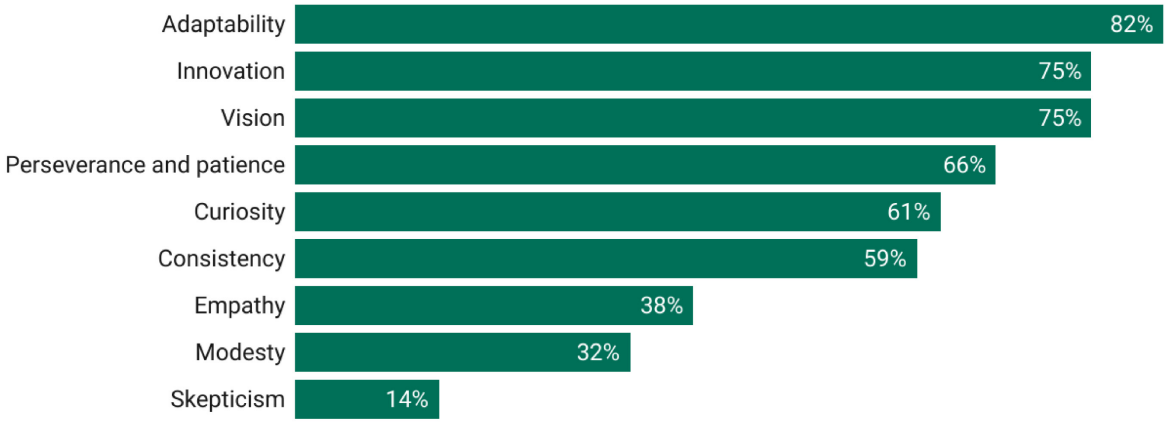


Figure *4: Important features for digitalization and sustainability processes*

The importance given to digitalization by students lies in their long-term vision and the importance they attach to this element. In a decision-making context, most students chose the hypothesis of engaging in a digitized organization, even with the assumption of a diminished salary. Students understand the importance of digitalization and are willing, at least at the declarative level, to give up a percentage of their salary provided that the organization in which they will carry out the activity to be a digitized one. Moreover, in terms of trust in organizations, respondents trust those who implement digitalization systems and value sustainability.

4. Conclusions

The orientation towards sustainability is emerging as a necessity of the contemporary economic and social reality, and digitalization proves to be one of the main tools through which the success of this transition can be ensured. Such a general ambition involves sustained efforts and among the university education system, students being the main pawns in the success of the sustainable development of the universities and society in general. Of course, these efforts are not at all facile and must be achieved and then maintained in the long run. Therefore, the actions needed, among students, with the aim of generating results and positive impact towards achieving sustainability should involve:

1. additional knowledge to fully understand the implications of sustainability and digitalization.
2. thinking based on a desire to adapt to the totality of educational and military training processes and activities.
3. the development of specific skills.

The conclusions of the research suggest that the analyzed university also approaches, within the academic and military training modules, strategies towards digitization, through the development of systems management informatics, students' competences regarding the improvement of professional results, but also in the direction of its transition towards sustainability, by implementing realistic models that they can implement at the individual or organizational level further. At the same time, there are many other aspects that need to be studied towards the sustainable and

digital development of universities and these relate, in general, to the availability of funds aimed at the research and transformation of education for sustainable development, cooperation with public authorities, the level of training and adaptability of teaching staff to the degree of development of systems for evaluating the progress of sustainability of higher education institutions.

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