

Human Resources Practices in the Context of Sustainability: The Forestry Case

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Abstract

This article aims to understand how Human Resources (HR) practices are articulated in the organizational context focused on the insertion and operationalization of sustainability. This is a qualitative research, conducted via case study in a forest operation of a Brazilian company that has sustainability at the core of its business strategy. Direct observation, semi-structured interview, and documentary research were adopted as data collection instruments; the data were analyzed according to thematic analysis of narratives. The results indicate efforts to articulate the organization's intention to adopt HR practices in the context of sustainability. We also verified that the intertwining of formal HR practices with those situated at the relationship level of groups contributes to the expansion of participation and communication, security culture, and of the generation and sharing of knowledge, enabling a working environment where the value of sustainability is shared, favoring the emergence of the human dimension of sustainability.

Keywords: Human resources practices, Sustainable human resources management, Sustainability, Narrative analysis

1. Introduction

There is growing debate about the need for organizations to become more responsible and active in solving environmental and social issues (Podgorodnichenko et al., 2020). The notion of needs and limits has marked the debates on the challenges to be faced, and, although present for more than 4 decades in business agendas and in different management functions (Randev & Jha, 2019), this perspective still lacks conceptual deepening and effective practices (Silva & Figueiredo, 2017, 2020; Vasconcelos & Silva, 2021).

One of the major challenges organizations have been facing in recent decades is making sustainability an essential condition for development. Notably, despite the pressures for change (Podgorodnichenko et al., 2020), organizations only provide answers to this scenario due to ethical, political, and competitive imperatives (Shrivastava & Hart, 1995), and not by voluntary decision.

Humanity still experiences one of the greatest challenges in its recent history, of socioeconomic impacts unlike any other event previously experienced. The health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the lack of balance and equality between the economic, social, and environmental dimensions (Nicolletti et al., 2020) and highlighted the importance of the critical and systemic view of organizations. This scenario reinforces the need to rethink business management in the context of sustainability (Nicolletti et al., 2020), minimizing the gaps between discourse and management practices (Silva Junior et al., 2019).

This study understands sustainability as a multidimensional, ambiguous, and dynamic concept (Nicolletti et al., 2020). Moreover, it is considered that, for a company to be sustainable, besides being profitable, it needs to consider in its decision-making process the social and environmental impacts of its actions and assume responsibilities for the well-being of stakeholders (Martins et al., 2019).

Studies on the implementation and operationalization of the corporate sustainability strategy, as well as on how to translate it into shared meanings and/or measurable processes and results (Ehnert, 2014), indicate that the main issue is in changing culture, mission, performance criteria, organizational culture, leadership, level of

motivation, qualification, and communication (Engert & Baumgartner, 2016), knowledge management (Martins et al., 2019), as well as employing it in everyday practices within the organizational context (Silva & Figueiredo, 2017, 2020). It is also evident in the interdependence between the sustainability strategy and the HR strategy in organizations (Aust et al., 2020; Ehnert et al., 2014; Gollan & Xu, 2014; Podgorodnichenko et al., 2020; Randev & Jha, 2019). In this direction, the studies suggests that this connection allows for contributions to overcome the challenges of sustainability (Engert & Baumgartner, 2016; Nicolletti et al., 2020; Vasconcelos et al., 2013).

Among the literature on Sustainable Human Resources Management (SHRM) there is no academic agreement on the configuration of HR policies and practices. However, there seems to be convergences regarding the potential contribution of these practices to sustainability (Podgorodnichenko et al., 2020; Randev & Jha, 2019), as well as the need to review the HR function and its policies and practices so that its contribution is effective (Aust et al., 2020; Bush, 2018; Buller & McEvoy, 2016; Enhert, 2014; Kramar, 2014; Mascarenhas & Barbosa, 2019; Ybema et al., 2017).

In this study, we considered that the sustainability strategy has a direct connection with the organizations' people strategy. Moreover, HR practices play a central role in the creation and adoption of sustainable principles, practices, and structures, allowing a working environment of shared sustainability values (Gollan & Xu, 2014; Podgorodnichenko et al., 2020). Thus, as a way to empirically explore the interdependent relationship between HR and sustainability, a qualitative research was conducted to understand how HR practices are articulated toward the insertion of sustainability in the organizational context.

The data show that conflicts and social and environmental pressures, associated with production limits and the diversity of understanding about sustainability, have boosted the organization to foster strategies and practices in which sustainability is understood as multidimensional and adopted as a transversal concept at its different organizational levels. However, in line with previous research, the organization experiences different operationalization challenges, including strengthening the social dimension of sustainability (Amrutha & Geetha, 2020).

Additionally, regarding the debate on the connections and contributions of HR practices within sustainability strategy, we noticed the existence of an intertwining of formal HR practices, located at the level of relationships within the groups. The intertwining of these practices is contributing to the expansion the of participation and communication levels, in the relationship and security cultures, and in the generation and sharing of knowledge. Thus, it enables a work environment where the value of sustainability is shared, with the potential to favor the integration of different organizational levels and different dimensions of sustainability.

This study can contribute to the field knowledge, since, based on a representative case of an organization whose sustainability strategy is central to competitiveness, it highlights the (1) dynamics that affect HR policies and practices and the need for coordinated actions aligned with organizational strategy; (2) efforts to approximate and articulate the organization's intention to adopt HR practices in the context of sustainability with management tools to achieve these objectives; (3) organizational practices that link HR to sustainability and results beyond the financial ones and; (4) possible effects by associating formal mechanisms of the organization with the practices of its members, contributing to the creation of a sustainable sphere.

In this sense, the study reaffirms the degree of contribution of the HR function to sustainability but provides indications about the potential that the HR function has for integration, with a multilevel approach, different organizational levels, and different dimensions of sustainability in organizational efforts.

2. Human Resources Practices in the Context of Sustainability

In the last three decades, in view of the scenario of increasing and intense transformations, there has been a search for new business and management models in organizational environments as a response to technological advances, global competition, the need for continuous innovation, worsening environmental and social crises, and socioeconomic, geopolitical, and demographic changes (World Economic Forum [WEF], 2020). One of the changes that stands out is the increasing complexity of work relationships.

Thus, a new perspective was adopted to understand the dynamics that affect HR policies and practices and to rethink the theories and practices in the field (Amorim et al., 2019; Kramar, 2014; Tung, 2016). Over time, the HR function has been approaching the strategy of organizations, creating space for actions that are coordinated and aligned with the company's objectives. This change has allowed the identification of trends that help organizations align their business, innovations, and people (Kramar, 2014).

Strategic human resources management is a line of thought that supports the organization's strategies with the objective of achieving the best performance of professionals to meet the company's final objectives (Aust et al.,

2020). For this, the policies and practices that make up the strategic human resources management are organized in order to improve the performance of the organization and financial and market results (Kramar, 2014).

In the last decade, the discussion on HR within the context of sustainability has produced a series of studies directing different organizational practices to link HR to sustainability and to link practices to results other than financial ones (Aust et al., 2020; Kramar, 2014; Randev & Jha, 2019, Ybema et al., 2017). Following this trend, we identified studies on leadership role to define and guide new forms of work practices and to form the perception of professionals (Bush, 2018; Jerónimo et al., 2020), the importance of teamwork, learning, and organizational identity (Kira & Lifvergren, 2013); In addition to approaches to health-focused work systems (Becke, 2014), human and social sustainability indicators (Osranek & Zink, 2014), training systems (Bush, 2018; Kira & Lifvergren, 2013), communication and collaboration structures (Bush, 2018), recruitment and selection (Bush, 2018; Jerónimo et al., 2020), development of self-management (Bush, 2018), and work engagement and performance systems (Jerónimo et al., 2020).

Thus, under the label “Sustainable Human Resources Management (SHRM),” studies differ in content, approach, and on focus regarding social, environmental, and/or human outcomes (Mazur, 2017). Randev and Jha (2019) argue that the literature of the field can be grouped into 4 orientations, namely: economic, social, environmental, and human. Although the authors argue that the guidelines are not exclusionary, it is possible to observe that the predominance of research in one or another orientation may be justified by the assumptions, the theoretical foundations, the interests of stakeholders, the time frame, and the contexts in which conceptions are examined (Mazur, 2017).

In turn, Aust et al. (2020) classify the literature of SHRM into four dimensions: Socially Responsible HRM (Type 1), Green HRM (Type 2), Triple Result HRM (economic, social, and environmental) (Type 3), and Common Good HRM (Type 4). For the authors, Types 1 and 2 still have a predominance of economic purposes, Type 3, while also for economic purposes, redefines performance by turning to mutual gains of shared values, and Type 4 indicates a change in the understanding of the business purpose, seeking the common good in the economic, social, ecological, and human dimensions.

Bombiak (2020) highlights the innovative character of the triple result model that, despite the restricted view, guided new practices by inserting aspects related to work-life balance, autonomy, and employability of workers. In her analysis, the author also indicates that the holistic model proposed by Peggy De Prins added to the strategic vision social, ecological, and psychological components to the HR model. Finally, Buller and McEvoy (2016) recognize the evolution in each of the proposed models but indicate the need for a multilevel approach in HR practices.

Commonly in the different approaches is the agreement that HR is at the center of the development of sustainable organizations and that its practices can contribute to human development within the organization and to the sustainability of organizations and people, as well as to broader results (Aust et al., 2020; Bush, 2018; Enhert et al., 2014; Gollan & Xu, 2014; Jerónimo et al., 2020; Kramar, 2014; Mascarenhas & Barbosa, 2019; Randev & Jha, 2019). However, although they recognize the contributions, researchers in the field agree on the need to review their way of acting, in order to move them away from the technical and procedural vision that lasted for so many years and the vision of efficiency of their resources and strategic targets (Aust et al., 2020; Enhert, 2014; Kramar, 2014; Ybema et al., 2017).

This review would bring HR closer and closer to the “ethical plurality of different stakeholders” (Mascarenhas & Barbosa, 2019, p. 360) and to the long-term objectives (Ybema et al., 2017) necessary for sustainable environments, requiring the HR function to take explicit moral positions (Bush, 2018; Enhert, 2014; Mascarenhas & Barbosa, 2019). Additionally, Jerónimo et al. (2020) warn that there will only be engagement of professionals in a sustainable model if there is a congruence between the organizational logic of sustainability and organizational identification, and that HR practices contribute to the development of a sense of self-identity and work identity.

Therefore, establishing HR practices that consider the multidimensionality of business and results, as well as the sustainability of their workforce (Ybema et al., 2017), is one of the central challenges of organizations. It lies in the approximation and articulation of the organization’s intention to adopt HR practices in the context of sustainability with management tools to achieve these goals (Gollan & Xu, 2014).

In this sense, we discuss the need for the HR function to appropriate the understanding of sustainability in its own conception, placing people at the center of the discussion of people management (Renwick et al., 2013). It is, therefore, a call to lead and support, integrate efforts, enabling the implementation of instruments that allow for communication between stakeholders, promoting health, employability, learning, and cultural change towards

sustainability (Podgorodnichenko et al., 2020).

3. Method

A qualitative research was conducted via case study (Stake, 2016; Yin, 2015) in one of the regional units of a company herein identified as Forestry to preserve identities. It is a Brazilian company with eucalyptus planting operations and pulp production, with locations in different regions of Brazil. The company was created in 2009, from a merging process of two companies, Company A, founded in 1967, and Company B, founded in 1988, which had different sustainability strategies in their business. Forestry was chosen because (1) the company directs efforts to promote sustainability as a transversal concept in operations, (2) declare to have sustainability at the core of its business strategy, and (3) they have a HR department developing efforts to consolidate the sustainability culture within the organization.

Individual interviews, direct observation, and documentary research were used for collecting data. The interviews were conducted in parallel to the observation period, being recorded and transcribed with the authorization of the interviewees. Based on a semi-structured script, we sought to identify the genesis of sustainability, the interviewees' understanding of the topic, the challenges of insertion, and HR practices. We conducted 19 semi-structured interviews with managers (E1, E2, E3, E4, E5), coordinators (E6, E7, E8, E9, E10, E11), operators (E12, E13, E14), technicians (E15, E16, E17, E18, E19).

Direct observation was performed in departments of forest operation, participation in training, and technical and managerial meetings, totaling 80 hours of observation. We sought to observe how sustainability was reflected in working practices and the contributions of HR practices in this context. Finally, the documents selected for analysis were social and environmental reports, sustainability and management policy, code of conduct, health procedures, safety, and training. Thereby, we sought to capture the institutional logic of sustainability, as well as its challenges and the mechanisms used for its insertion and operationalization.

All interviews were transcribed and read, isolating and ordering episodes in a chronological order (Riessman, 2008). Additionally, the records of the field notebook and documents were analyzed based on thematic analysis of narratives (Riessman, 2008). In this type of analysis, the focus is on the content of the narrative and what is sought within the text is what is said and experienced by the narrator and the thematic meanings similar to one another.

To guide the initial analysis, the following thematic units were established based on the literature review: (1) the genesis of sustainability; (2) meanings of sustainability; (3) the challenges of the insertion and operationalization of sustainability; (4) human resources practices; and (5) the contribution to the insertion of sustainability. Subsequently, new groupings were carried out due to insights from the interaction of the researchers with the content of the data analysis from the 3 sources, from which second-order themes emerged. Next, based on the thematic structure presented in Figure 1, we chose to construct a hybrid narrative (Riessman, 2008), which would reconstitute how HR practices are articulated aiming at the insertion and operationalization of sustainability in forest operations.

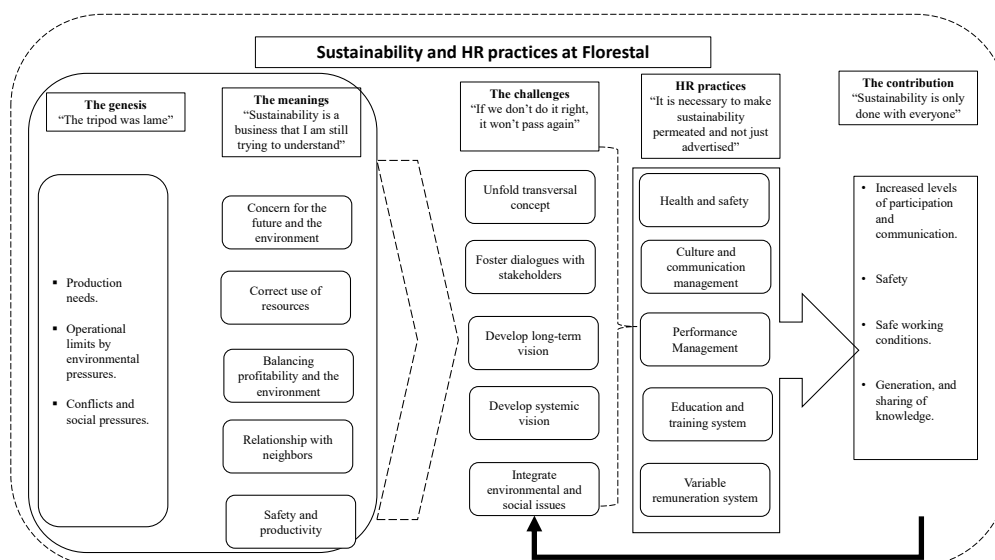


Figure 1. Thematic structure

Finally, the research followed the procedures of ethics in research with Human Beings, according to Resolution n° 466/12 of the National Health Council (CNS), and was approved by the Ethics and Research Committee. All participants were informed of the purpose of the research and had access to the Free and Informed Consent Form (TCLE).

4. Presentation of Results

4.1 Research Context

Forestry aims to develop businesses by associating profit with environmental conservation, social inclusion, and improvement in quality of life. Considering that sustainability is a fundamental requirement for growth and for building company values within the organization, a series of initiatives is continuously being developed with an environmental, social, and economic focus to reduce the impacts of its operations and balance the interests of stakeholders and the ecosystem, based on sustainability and management policies. Additionally, the company maintains several forest and management certifications and is included in national and international sustainability rankings and commitments.

The research was developed in Regional Unit 01 (UR01), located in the Southeast Region, covered by the former Company A. This unit houses 5,835 professionals, company employed and outsourced, responsible for: forest planning, seedling production, planting and maintenance of forests, harvesting and transporting wood, restoration and forest protection, licensing and environmental management, and relationship with communities.

The HR department is responsible for the proposition of policies and practices for development and sourcing, reward, and occupational health and medicine. It is subordinate to a corporate structure, and with a regionally team assigned to implement corporate guidelines and support local operations.

4.2 The Sustainability Narrative and HR Practices

Figure 1 represents the systematization of the analysis categories. In each of the thematic units, we tried to synthesize and integrate the contents of the different narratives of the genesis of sustainability and its meanings, as well as the challenges of insertion and operationalization. From there, the identified HR practices and the contributions of these practices to face the challenges of insertion and operationalization of sustainability are presented.

4.2.1 The Genesis of Sustainability and Its Meanings

By positioning sustainability as the basic premise of development, Forestry declares, according to documents analyzed, that sustainability is tied to its strategy. However, in mapping the genesis of sustainability in UR01, the interviews revealed the efforts for inserting sustainability in the practices of this unit. According to E1, the change lies in the understanding that the company's current challenge "implies not only planting eucalyptus but looking to the left side and seeing its neighbor."

In this unit, sustainability entered the agenda in the late 1990s. The insertion came from the need to increase raw materials, when "wood was lacking for expansion" (E9). The perception that the "tripod was lame" (E3), indicating the imbalance between the economic, social, and environmental dimensions, widened as social and environmental pressures grew, bringing tensions to management. Moreover, with the merger between Companies A and B, it was necessary that Forestry leaders define forms of operation that considered the balance between the dimensions.

The reports indicate that, in the past there, was a limited understanding of the notion of sustainability and one of the reasons would be because the debates were restricted to the management level and the sustainability department, which E4 called the "oasis of sustainability." In the different interactions we observed that, in UR01, sustainability is understood as a concept of different dimensions that is not assimilated by all in the same way, but rather understood and appropriate to their work contexts. As E12 reports, "sustainability is a business that I'm still trying to understand to this day."

In this unit, sustainability is understood as a set of actions related to the environment and the future, which is sustained by the values of respect and responsibility. Although there are distinct interpretations about the meaning of sustainability, and that the different groups emphasize different dimensions, depending on their degree of involvement with the subject, the compensatory character and the environmental view are predominant. This predominance is explained by E8 as a "legacy" of Company A, which has previously led the practice of environmental management culture and the insertion of environmental indicators in profit sharing programs, as identified in the documents investigated.

4.2.2 The Challenges of the Insertion and Operationalization of Sustainability

The movement of insertion and operationalization of sustainability in operations imposed a series of challenges for Forestry. One of the challenges repeatedly reported is the fact that, in the past, sustainability was treated exclusively by the management body, and the sustainability department was responsible for the social dimension, distancing itself from other professionals and from a reactive posture, especially when dealing with communities.

For the social dimension to be extensively understood and integrated with environmental and economic issues, form of harmonious coexistence with local communities and with the internal public are sought, such as the change in the performance of the sustainability area, which has migrated from a “posture of attending to conflict, to fostering open dialogues” (E10). The reports indicate that, in the past, relations were based on the distancing of communities and a model focused on the problem and not on joint solutions, as well as on the challenge of transforming internal relations, such as leader-subordinate relationship.

Another challenge is the development of the long-term vision, especially in operational activities. We observed that, for operators and technicians, this vision is related to the future, reflecting in the context of the work. For example, for E12, today, unlike the past, there is a “concern not to go over stump so as not to harm the sprouts that will be born.” There is also the perception that “if we do not do it right, we cannot pass again” (E16). The “pass again” represents the return of this operation, in the same community, after the cycle of 5 to 7 years. The company seems to be concerned over work processes that consider the future and the impacts on the community, as well as the care of oneself, the other, and the environment, issues that, until then, were not the focus for the delivery of results. Notably, the two interviewees have more than 20 years of business and experience the direct impact on communities, which may explain the understanding of the challenges of “coming and going” for local communities.

If, on the one hand, we identify that the understanding of the social dimension is gradually taking place, on the other hand, we denoted that this dimension has not yet completely been perceived as important for operations or for joint responsibility. Especially in the field observations, we identified fragmentation in the transfer of community relationship issues to the sustainability department. That is, there is evidence of difficulties in understanding a concept and approximation, at all levels of the organization, regarding the balance of the tripod announced by the company.

In addition to the challenges, the sharing of the notion of sustainability as a multidimensional and transversal concept. However, the interviews indicate that in UR01, the understanding of sustainability is articulated in three levels: organizational level, interpersonal level, and individual level.

At the organizational level, the analyzed documents show that the notion of sustainability is proclaimed via formal mechanisms, such as policies, procedures, and training. At the interpersonal level, we identified during field observation the existence of meanings shared among members of occupational communities, built by the collective on a daily basis. For example, for forest operators, sustainability is directly related to the way they practice safety at work, focused on personal protection and of the operation. Finally, we identified the presence of an individual level, in which the elaboration of the concept takes place from the experiences themselves.

For E7, “the sustainability that reaches professionals, especially at operational levels, is equalized via procedure, but is not resolved.” The point of view of E7 can be justified by the fact that they are one of the interviewees with shorter company time and because they act in a department that makes the interface between those who define the procedures and those who practice. We can, thus, highlight that for Forestry to overcome its main challenge of “pass again,” it will require practices that stimulate the different levels of understanding.

4.2.3 HR Practices

A set of HR practices, structured and conducted under UR01, were identified in the interviews and documents, focused on the dissemination of a common concept of sustainability. Such practices include health and safety, performance management, variable compensation, education, and training, associated with culture and communication management. This set, according to E5, is justified by the need to “make sustainability permeated and not only announced.”

Health and safety practices are indicated, especially by respondents from operational areas, as one of those that have contributed the most to the creation of a situational view of sustainability. The reports indicate that, although the concern with health and safety is not something new, there was an intensification, after the merger of Companies A and B, with the creation of programs and indicators focused on the topic. This movement generated, according to the interviewees, a cultural change. This change is reflected, for example, in the

leadership's understanding of security as a non-negotiable value and not as a barrier. According to E11 "Before, if safety stopped production, one wondered why it stopped. [...] not today. If they stop, they understand that there is a problem to be solved and ensure the solution before return."

The organization provides a structured body of knowledge on health and safety, using training, work gymnastics activities, normative procedures, dialogues on environment and safety, panel of indicators, and monitoring routines, according to reports of interviews and observations. Guided by these mechanisms, safe practices at work have been established by UR01 professionals, enabling, for example, that during the research, this unit had been without records of work accidents for 43 months. Moreover, the indicators point to a reduction in absences due to occupational diseases.

In E4's view, security "changed the relationships in the operation due to the strong sense of responsibility that has been developed." In the observations, we noticed that, within their routine, these professionals have been producing a situational view of respect toward relationships, safety, and of respect for life, which may indicate that workers have produced and reproduced this knowledge with their safe work practices.

The performance management system covers all professionals and is supported by management policies, according to the documents analyzed. The process is annual, evaluating behavior attributes and goals; the results are consequent, both for the education and development system and for variable remuneration. The greatest change reported in this practice is the degree of openness of leaders to the dialogue on development, generating greater approximation between the different hierarchical levels.

The variable compensation program is structured based on financial, environmental and safety indicators, which reflect general and specific goals of activities. These indicators are monitored through a panel and the committee of professionals who have the responsibility to discuss and reveal the results to the other levels of the organization. For the professionals of the operation, the indicators allow them to know how the work is going and understand what they are doing. In turn, for managers, it is a way to disseminate knowledge and share responsibility for achieving the results.

The systematic sum of periodic meetings involving all levels of the organization is a recent practice and considered by operators as a way to participate more in the daily life of the company. The Socio-environmental Performance Index (Índice de Desempenho Socioambiental - IDSA) is the indicator most cited by professionals and is "what contributes to the rooting of environmental issues" (E8).

The education and training system is based on a set of mechanisms that aim to train professionals in different levels of competence. Under the responsibility of the HR department or technical areas we identified technical training, training of new professionals, socialization at work, safety training, leadership development, and trainee training processes.

The analysis of education and training procedures and direct observation indicated that technical training emphasizes operational and environmental factors. It is inferred that this emphasis can contribute to the limited understanding of sustainability. Recognizing the need to broaden the understanding of sustainability, the HR area has been applying extensive training to all professionals, of which the themes are considered, by the organization, as essential for sustainability, such as: systemic and long-term vision, compliance, and ethics. During the research, all managers had already completed these trainings while the other levels of the organization were beginning it.

Using different channels and methodologies, the organization seeks to ensure the generation and dissemination of knowledge, thus building an awareness and guidance toward sustainability. However, despite acknowledging the importance of training processes, the professionals working in the operation believe that the greatest contribution originates from the investments made in basic education, still in the time of Company A, allowing an increase in the levels of education, awareness, and participation of professionals in the work.

During the research, we were able to follow a process of culture management that was being development, led by the HR department. According to E5, this strategy was created to generate knowledge and engagement regarding the contents that define the culture of sustainability and the brand of the organization in order to "consolidate the understanding of sustainability as the DNA and inspiration of the organization" (E5). The main message is that the company believes that sustainability must advance with growth, and that there is still a difference between the desired and the real level and that, therefore, it is necessary to seek transformational solutions together. According to documents orienting the campaign, leaders should act as "ambassadors of culture." Moreover, the content is disseminated via discussions with the teams.

Finally, direct observation data indicate that knowledge on sustainability has been produced from practices

established by the working groups, combining organizational procedures with the workings of this group. That is, by means of situated practices, shared meanings have been produced and practiced, allowing the development of competencies, such as systemic and long-term vision, planning, and sense of responsibility (Vasconcelos & Silva Junior, 2021).

5. Discussion

The narratives obtained from the different sources of data collection allowed us to identify that the progressive development of Forestry's discourse on implementing sustainability initially treaded a path of environmental management, followed the response to market imperatives (Shrivastava & Hart, 1995), until it reached the inclusion of social strategies to foster dialogue and broaden their action (Le Roux & Pretorius, 2016). This path required the organization to consider different time scales of the social, environmental, and economic aspects, prioritizing the long term, as well as the adoption of an integrative thought (Gladwin et al., 1995). However, as observed mostly by practitioners with less company time, the heritage of environmental management and the use of procedures to equalize the understanding of sustainability are still present to ensure the achievement of the results.

Although organizational discourse proclaims sustainability as a unique and transversal concept, we noticed a distance between discourse and understanding at different levels of the organization. It infers that the diversity of interpretations derives not only from the positions within the organizational hierarchy but also from the different logics and concepts used to deal with problems in the day to day. The adoption of a concept that is imprecise and polysemic brings to Forestry the challenges of operationalization, as discussed in the literature (Le Roux & Pretorius, 2016).

However, the data shows that there are in UR01, practices that are created, reproduced, and appropriated by their actors that indicate evolution in this understanding. In line with research already carried out (Silva & Figueiredo, 2017; Vasconcelos & Silva Junior, 2021), we argue that the promotion of these practices can contribute to the creation of work environments that operate under a shared value (Gollan & Xu, 2014).

Considering the debate on the contributions of HR practices for sustainability strategy, the results suggest that there are ongoing efforts to bring together and articulate HR practices so that they are aligned with the organizational sustainability strategy. In this sense, the data reveal efforts to articulate and understand the interdependence between people's strategy and the strategy of sustainability in business in organizations (Aust et al., 2020; Ehnert et al., 2014; Gollan & Xu, 2014; Podgorodnichenko et al., 2020).

Culture management practices led by the HR function have been a foundation for transformation, converging with the arguments that this change is one of the necessary conditions for the discussion of sustainability. We also highlight the positive effects of investments in education, which reflect in the expansion of participation, levels of knowledge, and engagement of organizational actors in sustainable practices, such as those that ensure health and safety.

Moreover, the practices articulated by the HR function in UR01, although not explained in the light of a single SHRM model, combines aspects in which, by way of different policies, HR is more predominantly associated with Social Responsibility, Green Behavior. and Triple Results (Aust et al., 2020). Therefore, it is possible to identify that, despite efforts to articulate the multidimensionality of sustainability, there is still a predominance of an economic orientation, evidencing the challenges of the HR function in adopting in its models the multidimensionality of business and results, as well as the sustainability of its workforce (Ybema et al., 2017).

Efforts to promote change in the understanding of the purpose of the business, looking to insert the human aspect in sustainability (Aust et al., 2020; Mazur, 2016; Randev & Jha, 2019), can be seen in culture management actions. As outcomes, we observed, at the level of the interactions of the groups, the expansion in participation and communication, the development of a culture favorable to strengthening relationships, and the expansion of security concepts.

The observations indicate that the working practices shared by professionals allows for the notion of sustainability to be constructed and reproduced (Vasconcelos & Silva, 2021), enabling conditions for the generation and sharing of knowledge on sustainability, the expansion of a democratic work environment, and the promotion of sustainability culture. For example, the safe working practices of the groups have enabled, in addition to procedural compliance, the exercise of a care ethic, which is manifested by further understanding the importance of self-care and care for others. A second example is how much practices of democracy in the workplace have influenced the increase of dignity and participation in decision-making processes. All these examples suggest effective ways to understand the human dimension of sustainability, as well as reinforce the

multilevel approach of HR practices in a way that meets the different needs within organizations (Aust et al., 2020; Mazur, 2016; Randev & Jha, 2019).

Thus, assuming the existence of an intertwining of formal HR practices with practices located at the level of group relationships (Vasconcelos & Silva, 2021), both the formal practices of the HR function and those that are articulated at the level of the groups are argued to play a fundamental role in the creation of capacities of the organizational actors. These capabilities can enable them to operate from the perspective of a concept that is ambiguous and dynamic (Buller & McEvoy, 2016), and that in the face of the global challenges of sustainability, includes in its dimensions, ecological, economic, social, and human aspects.

Therefore, in line with the existing discussions, the need for the HR function to lead and integrate organizational efforts at all levels is reiterated to enable the solutions that consider human needs in business environments and the congruence between the organizational logic of sustainability, organizational identification, and human needs (Aust et al., 2020; Jerónimo et al., 2020). In this sense, the studied case shows that, in order to contribute to an urgent scenario regarding the challenges of sustainability, the HR function must exceed its role of conciliator of expectations of business and people (Kramar, 2014). That is, via its policies and practices, with inclusive perspectives and solutions far from the functional and executing model (Amorim et al., 2019), they should propose and implement actions that promote health, safety, employability, education, democracy, justice, and cultural environment directed toward sustainability (Aust et al., 2020; Podgorodnichenko et al., 2020).

These challenges direct attention to an agenda for the HR function, in which the risks of all stakeholders within a business are considered, and moral values are adopted (Bush, 2018; Enhert, 2014; Kramer, 2014; Mascarenhas & Barbosa, 2019), as well as the incessant search for a convergence of the organization's intention and the practices and tools adopted (Gollan & Xu, 2014).

6. Conclusion

Aiming at understanding how GP practices are articulated and how they contribute to the insertion of sustainability in the organizational context, a qualitative research was conducted in a forestry company. In our study, we considered that the sustainability strategy has a direct connection with the strategy of people management in organizations, and that HR practices have a central role in building the capacities for organizational actors to operate from the perspective of a multidimensional, ambiguous, and dynamic concept.

We observed that a set of practices are developed in order to guide actions and strategies for sustainability as a transversal concept. The data suggest that these practices contribute to changes in hierarchy, communication flow, participation levels, relationship and security culture, learning and acting, even if they do not completely reflect the multidimensionality of sustainability and its balance, especially the human dimension.

Based on the data, we argue that, in the context researched, the company's policies and management processes require revision in order to overcome the challenges regarding the promotion of changes toward sustainability. Specifically, we identified efforts toward the alignment and articulations between business strategy and HR practices. In line with previous studies, in addition to the introduction of an ideal and normative concept, the enactment must be a constructed and shared path between multiple stakeholders and the practices must reflect the organization's real intentions regarding sustainability.

Considering that the employment of the sustainability paradigm in organizational environments implies the development of shared meanings, the more organizational practitioners have the possibility to create and appropriate this knowledge, the greater the possibilities of apprehension of a concept that is multidimensional and complex. This movement may favor members to learn collectively, establishing meanings and legitimizing the sustainability practices.

Although the study presents limitations in the ability to understand the case due to its scope, it can still contribute to the debates regarding the challenges of operationalization of sustainability and the interdependence of sustainability and human resources management strategies. When considering interdependence, it signals to all corporate managers the need to rethink management practices for sustainability, moving efforts towards human development and reconciliation of the different dimensions of the business.

It also indicates the urgency of transforming the HR function, from a traditional role in the standardization and application of labor policies to the responsibility of restructuring the work throughout the company towards sustainability. Thus, in the understanding of its role in the corporate sustainability strategy, the HR function must build and implement a sustainable agenda within organizations, modeling policies and practices to consider multidimensionality in business, ethical positions, vision, and the need of multiple stakeholders.

Finally, by shedding light on the possible gains arising from the intertwining of formal HR practices with the

practices arising from occupational communities and individuals, the study corroborates the understanding of sustainability as a concept that results from shared beliefs and objectives and that are inserted within organizations as a set of practices that are created, reproduced, and appropriated by their actors.

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No additional data are available.

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