

## ARTICLES

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# SUSTAINABLE HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY: AN AGENDA FOR DEBATE

*Gestão de recursos humanos sustentável e responsabilidade socioambiental: Uma agenda para debates*

*Gestión de recursos humanos sostenible y responsabilidad socioambiental: Una agenda para debates*

### ABSTRACT

This paper discusses five propositions that aim to reinterpret roles in contemporary Human Resource Management (HRM) as pro-business, inclusive, focused on the long-term sustainability of organizations and individuals, and beyond the immediate interests of shareholders. The propositions place relations between people at the center of HRM. Doing so requires an ethical and plural analysis of the field as it evolves and commits to new priorities and phenomena in the area. In fact, HRM has not yet clarified its role in sustainable management, and it is still at the margins of socio-environmental responsibility strategies. The debate allows for an approach that goes beyond how companies perpetuate social and environmental issues in the world of work and in the society.

**KEYWORDS** | Sustainable management, human resources management, corporate social-environmental responsibility, sustainability, stakeholders.

### RESUMO

*Este ensaio discute cinco proposições a uma agenda cujo desafio é reinterpretar papéis da Gestão de Recursos Humanos (GRH) na contemporaneidade, segundo uma orientação pró-negócios e inclusiva, focada na sustentabilidade de longo prazo de organizações e pessoas, expandindo sua ação para além dos interesses imediatos dos acionistas. A agenda proposta considera que as relações entre as pessoas estão no centro da GRH, o que demanda um projeto ético e plural de análise do campo e das organizações, que avance em se comprometer com novas prioridades e fenômenos da área. A agenda é importante porque a GRH ainda não consolidou a reflexão sobre seu papel na gestão sustentável, para além dos limites organizacionais e das questões ambientais, estando à margem das estratégias de responsabilidade socioambiental. O debate acaba por permitir uma abordagem que vai além da forma como as empresas reproduzem mazelas no mundo do trabalho e na sociedade.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE** | Gestão sustentável, gestão de recursos humanos, responsabilidade socioambiental empresarial, sustentabilidade, stakeholders.

### RESUMEN

*Este ensayo discute cinco propuestas a una agenda cuyo desafío es reinterpretar papeles de la Gestión de Recursos Humanos (GRH) en la contemporaneidad, según una orientación proempresarial e inclusiva, enfocada en la sostenibilidad a largo plazo de organizaciones y personas, que expanda su acción más allá de los intereses inmediatos de los accionistas. La agenda propuesta considera que las relaciones entre las personas están en el centro de la GRH, lo que demanda un proyecto ético y plural de análisis del campo y de las organizaciones, que avance en comprometerse con nuevas prioridades y fenómenos del área. En efecto, la GRH aún no consolidó la reflexión sobre su papel en la gestión sostenible más allá de los límites organizacionales y de las cuestiones ambientales, y está al margen de las estrategias de responsabilidad socioambiental. El debate acaba por permitir un enfoque que va más allá de la forma en que las empresas reproducen las contrariedades en el mundo laboral y en la sociedad.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE** | Gestión sostenible, gestión de recursos humanos, responsabilidad socioambiental empresarial, sostenibilidad, stakeholders.

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## INTRODUCTION

The debate on sustainable management brings Human Resource Management (HRM) closer to other fields and research streams such as green HRM (Renwick, 2018; Renwick, Jabbour, Muller-Camen, Redman, & Wilkinson, 2016) and sustainable HRM (Ehnert, Harry, & Zink, 2014; Kramar, 2014). However, this debate is too focused on the green economy, environmental issues, and the related consequences for HRM (Ehnert & Harry, 2012; Jackson, Renwick, Jabbour, & Müller-Camen, 2011) and only partially reflects the reality of developing countries, where these are socio-environmental challenges affecting individuals and communities at the margins of global production chains.

While the relationship between HRM and sustainability in production chains has been established as a key challenge (Becker, Carboli, & Langella, 2010; Jabbour & Jabbour, 2016), the discussion about the role of HRM in organizational change in sustainable organizations is still emerging. HRM has not yet established its role in sustainable management beyond organizational boundaries and environmental issues and is still at the margins of socio-environmental responsibility strategies (Fenwick & Bierema, 2008).

This essay follows other authors in search of an approach to HRM that goes beyond how organizations reproduce chronic problems in the workplace and in society (De Prins, Van Beirendonck, De Vos, & Segers, 2014; Macke, Genari, 2019). The debate on HRM socio-environmental responsibility has advanced from many perspectives and can provide promising frameworks to support the translation of corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies into managerial actions and outcomes that are relevant to all stakeholders (Jamali, El Dirani, & Harwood, 2015; Järlström, Saru, & Vanhala, 2018).

Recognizing this potential is important as it reflects the current literature that addresses how companies reproduce poverty (Hamann & Bertels, 2017) or why they should contribute to fight it (Blowfield & Dolan, 2014; Blowfield & Frynas, 2005; Boyle & Boguslaw, 2007; Jenkins, 2005; Newell & Frynas, 2007), especially in developing countries with regard to workplace issues (George, Howard-Grenville, Joshi, & Tihanyi, 2016; Lebaron, 2018; Mascarenhas, Gonçalves-Dias, & Baptista, 2015; Phillips & Sakamoto, 2011; Tonelli, 2017).

Thus, far from overcoming the theoretical and practical challenges facing HRM, this essay notes their small impact on the *modus operandi* of human resources (HR). The continued emphasis on themes associated with organizational behavior prevails, while discussions go on about the robustness of

studies that leave interpretative margins about practice in organizations. As the debate on sustainable management is introduced, it becomes evident that a new agenda needs to be articulated by means of propositions whose challenge is to reinterpret HRM roles according to a pro-business, inclusive approach focused on the long-term sustainability of organizations and people.

The agenda proposed here considers that human relations are at the center of HRM and requires an analysis that is committed to new priorities and phenomena in the area. In the current debate, there are trends indicating a greater recognition of the role of HR, with broad consequences to its orthodoxy. The theories and concepts discussed should go beyond the classic description of HR sub-areas and advance over other fields of management, with a greater intertwining of approaches.

## IN SEARCH OF A FRAMEWORK

HRM takes on different perspectives, thus building approaches that aim to consolidate a continuously changing field and incorporate aspects that are present in the organizational context. It takes on both subjective and objective dispositions which are dynamic and historically constructed. It is an ethics-sensitive field, and its impact on people is biased by idiosyncrasies and particularizing interpretations that shape their action strategies, particularly regarding its managers.

It can be argued that the nature of the HR manager's role, and any aspiration to what Kochan (2007) terms 'social legitimacy', requires them to retain an ethical stance and to pursue the ethical possibilities that arise. They might do this through seeking a 'strong' HR system, through alliances for policy formulation and implementation, by seeking opportunities to promote worker well-being and more generally by seeking to make ethical choices whenever the opportunity arises. To do so requires a strong sense of self-efficacy to sustain even an element of an ethical stance in challenging times and unfavorable contexts. Realistically we must accept that the constraints on and the boundaries of the HR role confirm that we should not look with any confidence to HR managers to ensure an ethical HRM (Guest & Woodrow, 2012, p. 118).

Thus, it is necessary to introduce sustainability as a concept associated with the long-term maintenance of systems, taking into account economic, social, and environmental aspects (Crane & Matten, 2010; Freitas, Souza, Teixeira, & Jabbour, 2013; Jabbour & Santos, 2008; Parente & Fischer, 2014). Following this line of thought, the idea of sustainable development (SD) provides the historical and contemporary socio-political context in which HRM is situated (Chams & García-Blandón, 2019).

SD is understood as the development standard that meets the needs of the present generation while preserving the ability of future generations to meet their needs (Guzmán, 1997). It refers to shared governance processes and assumes that resources are finite and therefore, it is necessary to prevent their depletion while also ensuring the conservation and renewal of natural and human resources, respect for human rights, and promotion of social justice. This involves reviewing companies' activities in the capitalist production-consumption system (Barbieri, Vasconcelos, Andreassi, & Vasconcelos, 2010).

SD encompasses both corporate sustainability (CS) and CSR, notions that have converged in their similarities (Steurer, Langer, Konrad, & Martinuzzi, 2005). It requires adopting business strategies and practices that meet stakeholder expectations while protecting, maintaining, and renewing resources for future generations. Companies are subject to pressure for greater transparency and interaction with stakeholders, and the social and environmental aspects of their performance in the production chain are evaluated due to the growing interconnection, interdependence and transactivity of organizations (Barbieri et al., 2010; Kolk, 2016; Schoemaker, Nijhof, & Jonker, 2006).

In HRM, thinking about the sustainability of work and employment systems becomes necessary in view of phenomena such as climate change, precarious labor trends, and the impacts of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Schwab, 2016). Sustainable labor systems presuppose that the management of labor relations goes beyond behavioral and economic issues, since minimizing the human, social, and environmental damage generated in these relationships is the responsibility of both businesses and society (Docherty, Kira, & Shani, 2009; Elkington & Rowlands, 1999).

Thus, we must expand the definition of the field to "institutions, discourses and practices focused on the management of people within an employment relationship enacted through networks comprising multiple public and private actors" (Voegtlin & Greenwood, 2016, p. 182), with HRM's socio-environmental responsibility being the "human resource management practices and strategies politically contested between companies, government and civil society around stakeholder interests in changing institutional, social and business contexts" (Voegtlin

& Greenwood, 2016, p. 182). This conception emphasizes the political and institutional dimensions of HRM and goes beyond the functional boundaries of the field. These paths are necessary because mainstream HRM has shifted toward strategies to the detriment of people and does not prioritize companies' long-term viability. This neglects the role of HRM in renewing, raising, and reproducing the resource basis upon which companies and communities depend (Van-Buren, Greenwood, & Sheehan, 2011; Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003).

Indeed, it is important that HRM recognizes new potential frontiers and gains further understanding of the territorial dimension of its activities (Christophe & Glée, 2014). This is because work generates value in global production chains across networks of companies located in different territories where they have varied impacts. It is worth noting that by territory we mean not only a geographical space, but also a social and cultural space where innovations occur over processes of identity creation or feelings of belonging (Santos, 1999). As companies recognize their dependence on the natural and human resources and social capital in their territories, they must integrate their SD goals and processes in these territories.

For Bories-Azeau, Defélix, Loubès and Uzan (2015), issues arising from the opening of HR to the territorial space can expand the field's scope of action to include, for example, the impacts of the current productive restructuring and local demands for new competences, while preserving the environment and respecting human rights in projects related to innovation and social and environmental responsibility. The environmental dimension of SD calls for global solutions, as its risks are not limited to well-defined political or organizational boundaries. However, intervention instruments are led to dialogue with local features and demands, which means that HR is called upon to contribute to broader projects. These involve multiple actors that mix private and public logics of action according to a concept of company that is based on partnerships and socially involved in territories (Uzan et al., 2017).

According to Costa (2002), companies allocate social investments to their own staff and the geographical surroundings of their industrial plants by funding sports and leisure areas, schools, and social policy providers. However, building sustainable labor systems depends on coordinated action between governments, organized civil society, and companies. For Wildhagen, Teodósio, Mansur, and Polanco (2015), starting from the territory to approach sustainability implies considering the territory as a whole in which different actors converge, including the company, which requires problematizing their different capacities in terms of power relations in space.

Territories' sustainability requires the operation of different actors; the involvement of society, government, and private organizations; and requires problematizing it from the territory itself (McLennan & Banks, 2019), without necessarily assigning a central role to the company. When encouraged to design and implement their own locally controlled development strategies, communities undergo social and economic changes that do not necessarily depend on corporate intentions or investments. The features of a territory (labor market, natural resources, institutional relations, productive structure, entrepreneurial and business capacity, and political culture) can be enhanced to generate economic growth and improve quality of life for the population.

In sum, sustainable HRM starts from the notion that the various facets of managerialism are reflections of the sociopolitical environment, an environment that is uncertain, unstable, and contested. The organization contributes to SD by delivering economic, social, and environmental results, also referred to as the triple bottom line of companies (Hart & Milstein, 2003). In a sustainable HRM agenda, the economic pillar refers to building solutions that ensure viability, competitiveness, and legitimacy for companies over the long term. The social pillar presupposes an ethical standard in work and employment management systems that pursues the renewal, regeneration, reproduction, and rise of human resources and social capital, while meeting stakeholders' needs (Guerci, Shani, & Solari, 2014; Phillips, 2003). The environmental perspective lies in the interrelationship between work and the environment (Zink, 2014). The environment is the set of physical, chemical, biological, and social components which can cause direct or indirect effects on living beings and human activities (Organização das Nações Unidas – ONU, 1972).

Sustainable HRM suggests that management's various levels of influence should receive attention because it recognizes the growing political power of companies and the reduction of state control over labor relations. It recognizes that public policy in many countries has failed to respond to changes in employment relationships to the benefit of employees. It also rejects the fallacy of relationships being shaped by free, fair, and independent parties (Dobbin & Sutton, 1998; Legault & Bellemare, 2008). Although businesses' responsibility to provide relief for chronic issues is quite controversial (Bosch-Badia, Montllor-Serrats, & Tarrazon, 2013; Freeman & Liedtka, 1991; Friedman, 2007; Porter & Kramer, 2006), responsive companies provide education, healthcare, and work and promote human rights and social justice (Singer, 2006; Valente & Crane, 2010). However, the HRM arena fails to confront its problems, considering them inevitable (Thornley, Jeffreys, & Appay, 2010).

In light of the above concepts, how do we make HRM practices evolve so as to ensure sustainability? HR practices are managerial tools that meet the needs of the company or its territory with impacts that they must predict; these tools must also address economic, social, and environmental aspects. Therefore, we present a five-topic agenda whose challenge is to reinterpret the roles of HRM in contemporary times.

## AN AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE HRM

### First proposition: To overcome inconsistencies in HRM

This proposition considers that HRM research and practice have always coexisted with multiple ethical compromises and contradictions in view of the attempt to mediate the needs of individuals at work.

The HR function faces its social legitimacy as it has lost moral authority due to the ambiguity that marks its performance (Kochan, 2007). The pursuit of ethical principles stumbles when HR seeks to improve its status by acting from within the management system, thus producing speeches according to management priorities, which may represent factors of negative impacts on individuals (Guest & Woodrow, 2012; Nishii, Lepak, & Schneider, 2008).

In terms of idea generation, this reflects on the quality of scientific output (Mascarenhas & Barbosa, 2013). It also bears the mark of being historically associated with an ambiguous and operational position, with little power in the organizational context (Farndale & Hope-Hailey, 2009; Guest & King, 2004) and focused on rigid control practices and normative and assistance mechanisms for employees.

Although the HR activity still has a relatively low organizational status, lacking even a formal directive position on organizational boards, paradoxically, there is a strong discourse of appreciation of individuals in organizations. In other words, the discourse about recognizing the individual is ironical considering that the HR activity still occupies a secondary position in the face of organizations' real demands and strategic decisions, thus preventing HRM professionals from actually working on stakeholder interests.

One feature that stands out is the excessive "behavioralization" of HRM practices, heavily attached to the traits and characteristics of individuals. This situation shows HR's difficulty in gaining a strategic position and reveals the lack of integration with other areas. Additionally, HR faces difficulties in overcoming an overly static approach with prescriptive values that

determine its functionality. The sum of this equation eventually impacts directly on the area's legitimacy.

The promise of strategic HRM was to give people recognition as long as they are aligned with managerial views. According to Greenwood and Van Buren (2017), the unitarian premise ("we are all part of one team") presupposes managers' responsibility to maximize shareholder value and a resistance to recognizing divergent interests. Thus, managers have an ethical responsibility to work toward making the interests of employees and employers converge, (Friedman, 2007) possibly to the detriment of other stakeholders (Freeman, Harrison, Wicks, Parmar, & de Colle, 2010).

It can be assumed that mainstream research is reductionistic because it is based on biased ideological constructions, the result of which are successive waves of managerial discourses (Barley & Kunda, 1992). In this context, there is abundant research on the hypothesis that HRM practices positively impact company performance, despite many doubts regarding how to identify and measure HR's contributions (Fleetwood & Hesketh, 2006).

This first proposition starts from the idea that the legitimacy of HRM as a historically consolidated knowledge area is associated with the search for sustainability by managing relations between people. This requires reevaluating theoretical frameworks in order to overcome their inconsistencies (Caldas, Tonelli, & Braga, 2011; Delbridge, Hauptmeier, & Sengupta, 2011; McLennan & Banks, 2019). Making sure that "relations between people" are at the center of HRM is more appropriate than accepting unitarism, since Management field incorrectly assumes that systematically controlling social relations is possible (Grey, 2004).

Following this line of thought, the dispute over the terminology of the area (personnel management vs. strategic management of people; human resources management vs. people management) becomes fallacious. The people addressed by HRM demand a plural and ethical project of analysis of the field and of organizations defined in relational terms; a project to encompass multiple stakeholder demands, recognize changes and interrelationships between local and global contexts, and advance in committing to the area's new priorities and phenomena (Bradbury & Lichtenstein, 2000; Brès, Raufflet, & Boghossian, 2017; Rowley, 1997; Watson, 2005). The next propositions deal with this project.

## Second proposition: To understand and incorporate new understandings about HRM ethics

Mainstream HRM does not recognize the boundaries of the unitarian premise. Studies on ethics and HR criticize the

usual economic notion of human resources that makes them manageable as non-human resources to be exploited and abandoned (Gama, McKenna, & Peticca-Harris, 2012). Moreover, these studies indicate gaps such as the limited impact of stakeholder theory on mainstream HR, since the former does not recognize the relationship between the individual and the company as essentially moral, but only as instrumental to the organization (Greenwood & Cieri, 2007). The notion of ethics refers to the application of reason to set specific rules and principles that differentiate right from wrong in a given situation or context. Morality refers to beliefs throughout social processes that inform individuals about right and wrong (Crane & Matten, 2010). When it comes to ethics in organizations, the subject often refers to controlling the behavior of individuals to restrict them to what is acceptable in business, with standards of conduct to manage the risks of unethical behaviors.

Recently, the perspectives of various HRM stakeholders have gained more attention (Beer, Boselie, & Brewster, 2015). Addressing multiple HR stakeholders emerged at the birth of strategic HRM through the "Harvard model" (Beer, Spector, Lawrence, Mills, & Walton, 1984). Understanding labor relations as relations between stakeholders opens the ethical analysis to the pluralism and pragmatism that this theory offers. There is a need for HR to adopt a broader understanding of humanity as a requirement to treat its stakeholders as moral subjects and more sophisticated judgments about what contemporary working relations entail (Kuchinke, 2010; Greenwood & Freeman, 2011).

Several authors point out the need to go further into the debate on the ethical dimension of HRM. From an ethical-normative perspective, HRM should recognize the nature of stakeholder management, assertively address how labor relations should be, and deal with the neglected demand for openly treating mutual gains, dignity, and well-being in stakeholder relations (Kochan & Osterman, 1994; Pirson, 2017; Teixeira, 2008). However, there are few studies on how HRM has been dealing with these issues practically (Braga, Kubo, & Oliva, 2017). Managing stakeholder relations is a historical process that goes beyond deconstruction and criticism to address normative issues and recognize reductionist tendencies of theories by accepting multiple ethical principles in analyses that are sensitive to sociopolitical contexts.

For example, sustainability and diversity have not yet been thoroughly connected to the broader debate on ethics and moral issues, and therefore a possible research agenda lies at the frontier of the fields of social sciences, philosophy, and Management (Davila-Gomez & Crowther, 2012; Jaime, 2009; Lucio, 2006). Within their scope, the company's commitments to the

common good (expressed, for example, in the ways in which diversity and sustainability are embodied in management and business practices) should be problematized under the broader umbrella of ethical and moral issues (Teixeira, 2008). It is also undeniable that the massive use of information technologies in HRM has not defined its ethical foundations oriented to equity (Eubanks, 2018) and privacy. Strengthening an evidence-generating culture that feeds comparative studies and solid bases for theoretical and applied knowledge in HRM requires reflection, as well as defining homogenizing aspects for readings that consider particular cases and specific features.

### Third proposition: To understand how company activities affect the resource base

Although HR cannot easily take on this capability, it must co-create organizational capabilities for this purpose. Among several possible justifications, Reed (2002) highlights the social obligations arising from authenticity (i.e., stakeholders' interests in keeping their individual and communal identities), which are dependent on the context in which the company operates, as well as on an understanding of past behavior in the relationship with local communities. In this millennium, HRM legitimacy is associated with acting on these fronts. For Kochan (2007), HRM "derives its social legitimacy from its ability to work as an effective lever for a social contract in labor relations that is capable of balancing and integrating the needs of employers, employees and the societies where they exist" (p. 600).

However, according to Marchington (2015), the HR function has been too focused on short-term performance metrics, neglecting other stakeholders' values and priorities. In a crisis of legitimacy, the challenge is to strike a better balance between speaking for employers and stakeholder interests. HRM's legitimacy stems from its ability to identify, gain knowledge of, and incorporate stakeholder interests into, decision-making processes, without affecting the company's ability to survive due to (i) lack of "license to operate", (ii) resource depletion by affecting the willingness or ability of individuals and institutions to provide capabilities to the company, and (iii) side effects or externalities of business activities that prevent the resource base from regenerating (Mariappanadar, 2014).

Sustainable work systems require that the research agenda penetrate views, be assertive about building bonds between people in the territories, and recognize human harm at work (exploitation, illnesses, dehumanization) and damage from resource exploitation (waste, degradation, deforestation,

impoverishment) (Bales, 2004; Gudic, Rosenbloom, & Parkes, 2014). Sustainable HRM must explicitly identify negative impacts as well as positive impacts on stakeholders, pay attention to policy implementation processes, and recognize tensions in matching their requirements. This approach takes on explicit ethical positions as to the desired short- and long-term results with the HR stakeholders (Kramar, 2014; Maak, 2007). This change requires rethinking traditional short-term assessments exclusively oriented to the internal public and introducing it into the flow of discourses and frameworks of values and interests of sustainable management in the territory. These ideas suggest the next proposition, which emphasizes social and environmental responsibility at the different levels of HRM operations.

### Fourth proposition: To work on the challenges of social and environmental responsibility at different levels of HRM

A pluralistic project for analyzing HRM recognizes the prevalent power of the company, its predominance in managing the psychological contract (Cullinane & Dundon, 2006), and the fact that the interests involved are not necessarily shared. This proposition suggests that HRM develop capacities and strategies in the local and global arenas to contribute to addressing chronic issues.

From an ethical point of view, Kuchinke (2010) proposes that HRM commit itself to development, as understood from Sen's philosophical perspective (2000), as a process of expanding people's real freedoms, i.e., their capabilities. HRM professionals are like agents of development who should question the conditions necessary for their stakeholders to realize their potential to enrich their lives by expanding their capabilities. Recognizing that investing in HRM is expanding people's capabilities means extending the HRM paradigm beyond the traditional short-term emphasis to make it dialogue broadly with stakeholders' expectations (Osranek & Kink, 2014).

We must ensure that alternative readings of the relationships between HRM constructs converse in order to prevent them from becoming 'umbrella' narratives that legitimize the interests of employers. For example, Ramsay, Scholarios, and Harley (2000) mark an alternative conceptualization of high-performance work systems from the viewpoint of labor process, practices that emphasize discretion at the expense of stress and intensification of work and serve as a key explanatory factor for performance improvement. However, HRM assumes that speaking of values associated with engagement and commitment,

constructs valued by mainstream research, has a greater ability to persuade by connecting with emotions and affectivity. An alternative is to build common narratives that allow the various ethical perspectives to coexist and dialogue with one another (Greenwood & Van Buren, 2017).

For HRM to strengthen its position, it is necessary to understand political and social processes at different levels and in new perspectives of action. A promising path lies in facilitating research, dialogue, and action in spaces where policies are negotiated and established (Kolk & Tulder, 2006; Valente & Crane, 2010; Vianna, 2007). Institutional and political dynamics need to be explored along with the potential of new technologies for a disruptive HR agenda (Slavin, 2019). These innovations are justified because HRM produces discourses in a noble space in society: between organizations and people. It must devote itself to systemic change, beyond the dominant managerialism.

For a variety of reasons – changes in employer preferences, globalization, and changing political philosophies to name three – public policy in several countries has failed to respond to changes in the employment relationship in ways that would have ultimately benefited employees. Despite any objections to the notion that protection of fair employment practices and vulnerable employees should remain the role of public policy and institutions, it seems apparent that this role is increasing being devolved to organizations and their HRM functions. Human resource professionals have more discretionary power over employment matters than in the past. In many ways HRM professionals are now expected to act as ethical stewards or the “conscience” of organizations (Van-Buren, Greenwood, & Sheehan, 2011, p. 211).

### **Fifth proposition: To develop responsive leadership capabilities for a new HRM environment**

According to Maak and Pless (2006), responsive leadership is a social, relational, and ethical phenomenon that occurs along processes at the local and global levels in interactions between a multitude of stakeholders, and it seeks the common good in the territory. Responsive leadership requires citizen-like and visionary behavior in the face of critical issues in society; the

ability to seek broader, more difficult consensus than usual in companies; and building common meanings for stakeholders by participating in SD processes from diverse perspectives and positions (Bradley, McMullen, Artz, & Simiyu, 2012; Maak & Pless, 2009). According to Maak (2007), responsive leaders build social capital by weaving networks of rich relationships for individuals who would otherwise be isolated. In doing so, they aggregate the energy of different political groups, sharpen world perspectives, provide quality and accessibility of information, and give attention to projects’ contextual aspects and immediate interests, thus managing implementation priorities.

## **CONCLUSION**

This agenda points to the relevance of an HRM that incorporates conceptual features of various theoretical or ideological frameworks arising from different knowledge areas. It is remarkable that the changes that society undergoes have so little impact on the modus operandi in HRM. In line with Dundon and Rafferty (2018), we reinforce the warning about the risk of HRM intellectual and professional impoverishment due to the uncritical adoption of a pro-market ontology rather than a pro-business, inclusive orientation focused on the sustainability of organizations and people.

As a specialist field, its contemporary approach can be associated not only with the technical mastery of its traditional processes, but with the reflection and action on the human condition over the processes in which strategies are built (Jarzabkowski & Fenton, 2006). Along these lines, procedural and relational views of HR-relevant phenomena (Watson, 2005) give the field new insights, as it becomes more connected to the community. The HR professional must be a special kind of “stranger” who is able to refer to his or her knowledge of history and theory, pays attention to critical faculties, acts autonomously in relation to power centers, and takes on the role of provoking well-informed stakeholder discussions on critical issues (Goldfarb, 2012).

Several authors speak of an HR approach that recognizes stakeholder interests and seeks potential contributions to policy debates about wider social challenges, including equal opportunities and inclusion in the workplace. Indeed, HR professionals operate in a complex world that requires balancing a variety of activities and outcomes. We propose that HRM practices should be able to encompass the ethical plurality found in stakeholders’ interests without privileging particular views. Therefore, it is necessary to reflect further on HRM interactions with the various research

areas associated with the understanding of historical, social, and productive dynamics that impact its stakeholders. This agenda also puts the field's scientific approach into debate, and to make studies more relevant, we need to expand the agenda. "The stakeholder approach will require qualitative, case-based studies also through action research, which is inexistent in current academic research" (Beer et al., 2015, p. 432).

In conclusion, this agenda leaves open many questions about territorial and knowledge boundaries. Sustainability also involves understanding and incorporating affirmative and inclusive actions, for example, in addition to those associated with the effects of technology on HRM. Moreover, it is necessary to reflect on how far organizations are willing to go in order to strengthen and recognize HRM as a privileged arena of debates that have impacts on organizational actions, whether strategic, instrumental, or functional ones. The sustainability debate, which pervades the organizational environment, emerges as an opportunity that highlights the importance of including people as protagonists, while ensuring an ethical role for HRM due to the complexity and controversy involved.

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