

## **Sustainable Human Resource Management with HR Business Partner: Convergences**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The Human Resources management (HRM) area has undergone several changes, due to economic, social, and technological contexts (Storey, Ulrich, & Wright, 2019). The book “HR Value Proposition” (Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005) states that the HRM main purpose is to add value to the organization. It suggests important transformations for HR function, such as focusing on the business, understanding customers demand, investors, managers, and employees, and, thus, becoming a Business Partner to create competitive advantages and align HRM practices with the requirements of internal and external stakeholders, that is, the value for stakeholders (Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005).

The Human Resource Business Partner concept emerged in the 1980s with the aim of bringing HR closer to the business area, making HR a strategic business partner, as well as an administrative specialist, employee advocate and change agent. Through Business Partner (BP), instead of measuring processes, HR starts to measure results (Galbraith & Lawler, 1995; Ulrich & Dulebohn, 2015).

However, a new phase emerges to connect HRM to a broader business context in which companies operate to anticipate and respond to external business conditions and aggregate value to customers and investors. In this external/internal approach, value creation is not limited to just serving employees, but to ensuring that the services offered by HR within the company are aligned with external expectations (Ulrich & Dulebohn, 2015).

The volatile global business context, changes in consumer norms, and pressure to meet the challenges of today’s society made the HRM model evolve toward the external/internal HRM approach (Ulrich & Dulebohn, 2015), causing a gradual evolution toward alternative “pluralistic,” “green” and “sustainable” models and “democratic” HRM practices, which have not yet gained practitioners or academic acceptance (Aust, Muller-Camen, & Mathews, 2019).

Thus, HRM models addressing sustainability challenges and the urgency of transforming business environments into global markets have emerged. The Sustainable Human Resources Management (Sustainable HRM) model (Ehnert, 2009), proposes a way for organizations to go beyond the capital value paradigm, meeting the needs of stakeholders, and providing a real social and environmental impact (Aust et al., 2019). Sustainable HRM allows the achievement of financial, social and ecological objectives, with impact inside and outside the organization and on a long-term time horizon through the adoption of HRM strategies and practices (Ehnert, Parsa, Roper, Wagner, & Muller-Camen, 2016).

The study on this model is complex, diverse, fragmented, and with different debates (Ehnert & Harry, 2012; Järlström, Saru, & Vanhala, 2018; Macini, Alves, Cezarino, Liboni, & Caldana, 2020; Richards, 2020). It attempts to manage the relationship between HRM policies and practices and results going beyond only financial outcomes (Kramar, 2014).

We review existing literature addressing "sustainability" and "business partner," keywords. We look for studies that relate Sustainable HRM and BP, which we infer is a possibility to assist in the implementation of the emerging model of Sustainable HRM. No previous studies were found relating these two constructs. Previous research does not address the relationship and alignment between BP function and the Sustainable HRM model. Therefore, this study proposes to investigate this gap by answering whether is it possible to implement the Sustainable HRM model through the BP function.

The Sustainable HRM model can be seen as the most complex challenge already attempted by HR (Westerman, Rao, Vanka, & Gupta, 2020). Thus, this study wants to use the

Business Partner (BP) function as the path by how the HR area structures its activities to implement the emerging and necessary model to Sustainable HRM.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### **Sustainable HRM model and the Business Partner (BP) role**

The evolution of the HR function in corporations has been studied since last decades (Ulrich & Dulebohn, 2015). The HR business partnership role creates value for the line manager (Galbraith & Lawler, 1995; Ulrich & Dulebohn, 2015), and its five main characteristics (Ulrich, 2020):

**TABLE 1: Characteristics of BP- Business Partner HR role**

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>main aspects</b>
Strategic Partner	Positioning a company to win in its market
Change Agent	Making change happen and managing organizational culture
Trustworthy Activist and Guardian of Culture	Building trusting relationships with a proactive perspective, a cultural guardian
Technological Innovator	Using technology and social media to drive high-performing organizations
Conflict Mediator	Process management following regulatory guidelines

Source: Based on Ulrich (2020).

The role of business partner remains the dominant HR function role, especially in large companies (Gerpott, 2015; McCracken, O’Kane, Brown & McCrory, 2017). However, the continuous change in the business environment requires the adaptation of HR function to its new context (Ulrich & Dulebohn, 2015). Currently, there is a need to include sustainability in business, and although companies are transitioning to a more sustainable business practices, HRM studies and organizational practices are still at an inflection point (Westerman et al., 2020).

Organizational sustainability focuses on environmental and social resources, in addition to financial ones, which makes decisions to protect intergenerational equity resources (Bansal & Desjardine, 2014). In this sense, the emerging HRM sustainable model connects corporate sustainability to HRM policies and practices and explores the role of people management in the integration of general corporate strategy. This model does not necessarily exclude the HRM practices adopted by the organization, but rather adds knowledge to the existing ones (Ehnert, 2009; Cohen, Taylor, & Muller-Camen, 2012).

Sustainable HRM can be defined as "the adoption of HRM strategies and practices that allow the achievement of financial, social and ecological goals, with impact inside and outside the organization and in a long-term time horizon" (Ehnert, Parsa, Roper, Wagner, & Muller-Camen, 2016, p. 90). The characteristics of Sustainable HRM is:

**TABLE 2: Characteristics of Sustainable HRM**

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>main aspects</b>
Long-term orientation	Identification of the availability of human resources in the future; identification of the needs of future employees; elimination of the "hire and fire" approach.
Beware of employees	Health and safety management; work-life balance.
Care for the environment	Employee performance evaluation and rewards according to criteria related to the environment; foster the "eco-career".

Profitability	Program sharing to subsidize <i>Sustainable HRM</i> .
Employee participation and social dialogue	Engagement through different types and forms of participation.
Employee development	Work rotation; different forms and methods of training; experience transfer; focus on future skills and employability.
External partnership	Cooperation with the education system; partnership with all external stakeholders.
Flexibility	Flexible working arrangements; job rotation.
Compliance beyond labor regulations	The representation of employees in decision-making, in addition to legal requirements; financial and non-financial support.
Employee cooperation	Teamwork; good relationship between managers and employees.
Justice and equality	Promotion of diversity; respectful relationships; fairness concerning pay and career.

Source: Stankeviciute and Savaneviciene (2018).

This Sustainable HRM model provides employees with access to a more natural environment and comfortable spaces to work that inspire people to be creative, giving them the option to choose between different benefits, which increases job satisfaction, and happiness, and decreases absenteeism by generating mutual gains.

For organizations to become more sustainable, the support of the HR area is essential, filling the gap between sustainable organizational practices and values, and designing a communication system to report and disseminate sustainable practices and values (Freitas, Jabbour, Mangili, Leal Filho, & Oliveira, 2012). However, organizations have challenges to achieve a sustainable scenario, so a new way of managing people more sustainably is necessary (Savaneviciene & Stankeviciute, 2017).

According to Ulrich and Dulebohn (2015), the business partner role considers the culture and the environment, assumes the role of a strategic partnership, understands employees organizational competencies, in addition to consider the traditional talent management activities and roles (i.e., people, work processes, and individual competencies).

The BP role can help addressing the challenges of Sustainable HRM. It can carry out – execute the plans in practice, in addition to just developing them; it can generate satisfaction – promote balance between the various stakeholders; it can plan – in an integrated way, the work of HR and the company business; it can predict risks – pay attention to the risks of projects and situations and analyze their impacts; as well as it can enable – develop the team to disseminate and apply the planned strategies (Ulrich & Dulebohn, 2015).

Finally, the HR function must have a key role when implementing organizational strategies for sustainability, as HR involvement is essential in creating the conditions for the transition to a sustainable business model (Buller & McEvoy, 2016; Mariappanadar, 2003; Westerman et al., 2020).

## METHODS

This exploratory study wants to integrate management literature and analyse the existing knowledge about Sustainable HRM and HR Business Partner function. The literature search was conducted in the following search platforms: the Social Sciences Citation Index (Web of Science), Scopus (Elsevier), Emerald Insight, OneFile (GALE), Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) and Taylor & Francis Online collections. It included articles whose journals were peer-reviewed, and were published between January 2016 to April 2021.

The search terms used were: “Sustainable Human Resource Management” and “HR Business Partner.” We used also as criteria of inclusion that papers have content that describes

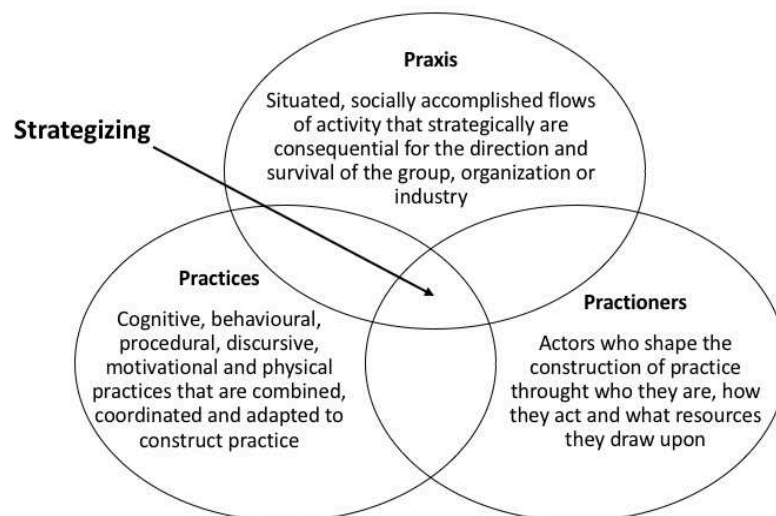
either practices , praxis and/or practitioners of Sustainable HRM and/or Business Partner. The review and analysis was carried out from the perspective of Strategy as a Practice framework.

### Data analyses strategy

Strategy-as-Practice is a theoretical framework for data analysis through the understanding of how actions and structures are articulated in the strategy formation and implementation process. It shows where and how activities occur, who performs them, and what skills are necessary for this function (Whittington, 2006). It considers, specifically, the performance of practices, the practitioners as actors, and the praxis of the strategy more than the performance of the organization (Jarzabkowski & Whittington, 2008).

We frame our systematic review of research publications in this theory as it helps to analyse how the Business Partner role can be used in the implementation of Sustainable HRM. As can be seen at Figure 1, the Strategy-as-a-Practice model (Whittington, 2006) articulates and interrelates three key concepts: practices, praxis and practitioners. We will use this framework to provide a summary of the main findings of selected scientific papers for this study.

**FIGURE 1: Strategy-as-Practice Framework.**



Source: Whittington (2006).

**Practices** involve several routines and are defined as a set of technologies, tools, concepts, ideas, and procedures that are of great use for strategists to think, act and "make the strategy" (Jarzabkowski & Whittington, 2008).

**Praxis** is the actual work done to execute the strategy; as praxis is a diffuse activity, it involves senior management, tactical and operational collaborators, conversations, being seen through episodes, project execution, consultancy, presentations, meetings, and strategic conversations (Jarzabkowski & Whittington, 2008).

Finally, **practitioners** are those people who think about the strategy, or "strategists,". They can be the owners, managers, members of the board of directors (Whittington, 2006), but also can include those who are not directly linked to the company but who exert indirect influence, such as policymakers, the media, gurus, and business schools (Jarzabkowski & Whittington, 2008)

For the purpose to shed light to the study objectives, we will consider practices, praxis, and practitioners the **variables**.

Analyses and results were organized in two **categories**: HR Business Partner (BP) and Sustainable HRM. For each study, it was analysed which variables (practices, praxis, and practitioners) were present. These variables were then classified according to the characteristics of BP and Sustainable HRM. When Sustainable HRM and BP role have the same characteristics, we consider convergent characteristics.

The convergent design occurs by collecting and analysing two separate independent databases – quantitative and/or qualitative – and then, merging them to compare or combine the results. The interpretation of the results leads to the understanding of the convergence, relationship, or the combination of these results with each other (Creswell & Clark, 2017).

Thus, this study evaluated the convergence between variables of the two categories to demonstrate the similarities between them and finally we will suggest the implementation and execution of the Sustainable HRM model through the BP role.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We found 66 articles in peer-reviewed journals, which 26 were excluded for not meeting the inclusion criteria. Thus, we selected in total 40 papers, coming from 23 different management journals, which were the subject of this review\*.

### Practices Convergences

We found practices (ideas) common to both models (BP and Sustainable HRM). First, we will present the BP characteristics found in the Sustainable HRM practices model, and then we will do the opposite: the Sustainable HRM characteristics found in BP.

We found convergence among the practices (ideas): 1) With a higher incidence of Sustainable practices in BP (65% of articles). 2) With more incidence of BP in Sustainable HRM practices (57% of articles). This differences may be due because Sustainable HRM is an emerging model that has new ideas, and probably builds on existing ideas from previous models, such as the BP itself. The fact that there are convergences between existing and new ideas is an important factor in the success of a new model.

### Business Partner (BP) practices characteristics in Sustainable HRM research papers

In our search we found 23 papers about Sustainable HRM practices that include several BP characteristics. In some cases the same Sustainable HRM paper includes more than one BP characteristics, and the same paper can include practices and/or praxis. So, we found 13 papers that includes *Practices* of BP (is what execute the strategy).

**TABLE 3: Sustainable HRM papers that include BP “Practices” characteristics**

<i>BP characteristics</i>	No. papers practices	Papers about Sustainable HRM
<b>Strategic Partner</b>	Practices: 3	Davidescu, Apostu, Paul, & Casuneanu, 2020; Wang & Tseng, 2019; Xu, Zhang, Yang, & Wu, 2020.
<b>Change Agent</b>	Practices: 5	Chams & Garcia-Blandón, 2019; Gardas et al., 2019; Li, Sun, & Li, 2019; Stankeviciute & Savaneviciene, 2018°; Stankeviciute & Savaneviciene, 2018b.
<b>Trustworthy Activist &amp; Guardian of Culture</b>	Practices: 3	Pellegrini, Rizzi & Frey, 2018; Roca-Puig, 2019; Strenitzerová & Achimský, 2019;
<b>Technological Innovator</b>	Practices: 1	Zhang et al., 2019.

<b>Conflict Mediator</b>	Practices: 1	Almarzooqi et al., 2019
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Source: Authors' elaboration

The BP characteristics: “change agent, trusted activist and guardian of culture, technological innovator, conflict mediator, and strategic partner” were found in the practices of 13 (57%) articles of Sustainable HRM.

The BP characteristic “change agent” is in Sustainable HRM, as a need for a new approach to HR with a long-term focus on development, regeneration, and renewal (Savaneviciene & Stankeviciute, 2017); being a design option, which allows to maintain, renew and restore human resources (Stankeviciute & Savaneviciene, 2018); helping to develop a sustainable work environment and facilitating the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals - SDGs (Chams & García-Blandón, 2019); through a high-commitment work system (Li, Sun, & Li, 2019) even when faced with barriers to implementation (Gardas, Mangla, Raut, & Luthra, 2019).

The characteristics “trustworthy activist and guardian of culture” appear in Sustainable HRM concerning the need to follow social norms that contemplate the ethical principles of loyalty, trust, mutual commitment, and equity in work relationships to create a sustainable organizational culture (Roca-Puig, 2019), and in promoting and valuing sustainability among line managers (Pellegrini, Rizzi, & Frey, 2018) loyally and fundamentally (Strenitzerová & Achimský, 2019).

Regarding the characteristic of “technological innovation,” it was found in a Sustainable HRM practice, a warning that innovation should be the focus for sustainable human resource management, as it motivates the sustainable development of organizations (Zhang, Sun, Zheng, & Liu, 2019). The “conflict mediation” feature is seen as a necessity for Sustainable HRM as it brings positive organizational results with a focus on the perceptions of employees when there is a need for mediation of direct relationships (Almarzooqi, Khan, & Khalid, 2019).

Finally, the characteristic of “business partner,” so present in the BP articles, also appears in Sustainable HRM articles since sustainable HRM is also understood as an extension of strategic human resources (Davidescu, Apostu, Paul, & Casuneanu, 2020), a survival strategy to maintain a successful venture in the long term (Wang & Tseng, 2019), developing strategies and practices that enable the achievement of financial, social and ecological goals, impacting inside and outside the organization and on a long-term time horizon (Xu, Zhang, Yang, & Wu, 2020).

### **Sustainable HRM practices characteristics in Business Partner (BP) research papers**

In our search we found 17 articles about BP that include several Sustainable HRM characteristics. In some cases, the same paper about BP includes more than one BP characteristics, and the same paper can include practices and/or praxis. So, we found 11 papers that includes *Practices* of Sustainable HRM (those who execute the strategy).

**TABLE 4: BP papers that include Sustainable HRM “Practices” characteristics**

<i>Sustainable HRM characteristics</i>	<b>N. papers Practices</b>	<b>Papers about BP</b>
<b>Long-Term Orientation</b>	Practices 2	Oppong, 2017; Pandey & Pattnaik, 2017
<b>Beware of Employees</b>	Practices: 1	Francis & Baum, 2018
<b>Care for the Environment</b>	Practices: 1	Yusliza, Othman, & Jabbour, 2017
<b>Profitability</b>	Practices: 1	Cristiani & Peiro, 2018
<b>Employee Participation &amp; Social Dialogue</b>	Practices: 3	Kellner, Townsend, & Wilkinson, 2016; Heizmann & Fox, 2017; Nadeem & Aziz, 2018
<b>Employee Development</b>	Practices: 1	Sharma & Sengupta, 2018
<b>External Partnership</b>	Practices: 1	Ulrich, 2020
<b>Flexibility</b>	Practices --	---
<b>Compliance beyond Labor Regulations</b>	Practices --	---
<b>Employee Cooperation</b>	Practices: 1	Dhanpat, Buthelezi, Joe, Maphela, & Shongwe, 2020
<b>Justice and Equality</b>	Practices: --	---

Source: Author's elaboration

Eleven articles (65%) in the BP category include characteristics of Sustainable HRM. Sustainable HRM has 11 characteristics, of which eight were found in the BP studies: care for the environment, external partnership, employee participation and social dialogue, long-term orientation, employee development, care for employees, employee cooperation, and profitability. Thus, BP studies available showed several practical characteristics of Sustainable HRM, among which were not found, Flexibility, Compliance beyond Labor Regulations, Justice and Equality.

Regarding “care for the environment,” an article brought up that the added value of the HRBP function is an important aspect to ensure the successful implementation of Green HR practices (Yusliza, Othman, & Jabbour, 2017). Concerning “external partnership” another BP study (Ulrich, 2020) understands that it is necessary to deliver value to customers, investors, and communities outside the organization.

“Employee participation and social dialogue” is another Sustainable HRM characteristic that appears in BP studies such as to strengthen the link between HR, line management, and goals achievement (Nadeem & Aziz, 2018), to add value and be legitimized by line managers (Heizmann & Fox, 2017), and to be able to link the work of employees with the purpose of the organization, key to high performance (Kellner, Townsend, & Wilkinson, 2016).

When referring to “long-term orientation,” HR functions should be considered an integral part of strategic business units (Oppong, 2017), after all, the BP helps to develop the strategy of companies, including start-ups (Pandey & Pattnaik, 2017), and also adding value and competitive advantage to the organization (Cristiani & Peiró, 2018).

Furthermore, it must “care for employees”, as in some cases the BP model is criticized for being only close to the strategy, but far from the employees (Francis & Baum, 2018). Being with employees is part of the characteristic “employee development,” as the BP helps in the succession of leaders (Sharma & Sengupta, 2018), and in “employee cooperation”, for example, by taking advantage of the industry 4.0 opportunities and mitigating associated challenges (Dhanpat, Buthelezi, Joe, Maphela, & Shongwe, 2020).

## **Praxis Convergences**



Following the same analyses as per “practices”, we also found praxis (activities) that were common to both categories. We will first present praxis from the BP characteristics found in the Sustainable HRM articles, and later the Sust HRM characteristics found in the BP.

The convergence of praxis characteristics was (74%) for BP, which may mean that many Sustainable HRM activities are already developed in BP. Similarly, Sustainable HRM praxis was also found in 53% of the BP articles. Therefore, in this research, there were more BP activities in Sustainable HRM than vice-versa, which corroborates the fact that Sustainable HRM is an emerging model that has new activities and is probably supported by existing activities.

### Presence of Business Partner (BP) praxis characteristics in Sustain. HRM research papers

We found 17 papers that includes *Praxis* of BP (is what plan the strategy):

**TABLE 5: Sustainable HRM papers that include BP “Praxis” characteristics**

<i>BP characteristics</i>	No. papers praxis	Papers about Sustainable HRM
<b>Strategic Partner</b>	Praxis: 3	Babel'ová, Stareček, Koltnerová, & Cagáňová, 2020; Gardas, Mangla, Raut, Narkhede, & Luthra, 2019; Sorribes, Celma, & Martínez-Garcia, 2020
<b>Change Agent</b>	Praxis: 3	Davidescu et al., 2020; Ragmoun & Alwehabie, 2020 ; Tooranloo, Azadi, & Sayyahpoor, 2017.
<b>Trustworthy Activist &amp; Guardian of Culture</b>	Praxis: 5	Roca-Puig, 2019; Stankeviciute & Savaneviciene, 2018a; Strenitzerová & Achimský, 2019; Wang & Yang, 2021; Zhang, Sun, Zheng, & Liu, 2019.
<b>Technological Innovator</b>	Praxis: 1	Zhang, Guo, Lei, & Lim, 2019
<b>Conflict Mediator</b>	Praxis: 5	Babel'ová, Stareček, Cagáňová, Fero, & Čambál, 2019; Chams & Garcia-Blandón, 2019; Hong & Kim, 2019; Pellegrini et al., 2018; Xu et al., 2020.

Source: Authors' elaboration

The BP characteristics: “change agent, trusted activist and guardian of culture, technological innovator, conflict mediator, and strategic partner” were also found in praxis: 17 (74%) articles of Sustainable HRM, an even higher number than in the variable of practice. As the praxis corresponds to the activities, it may mean that many Sustainable HRM activities are already being developed in BP.

Sustainable HRM articles presented the "change agent" characteristic when presenting HR managers reengineering business processes to maximize the revenue of an organization (Tooranloo et al., 2017), implementing activity, schedule, and workplace flexibility (Davidescu et al., 2020), and using the dynamic capabilities to integrate, build and reconfigure the internal and external environments to deal with rapidly changing environments (Ragmoun & Alwehabie, 2020).

As a “trusted activist and guardian of culture,” Sustainable HRM converges with the BP when it also understands that HR must be a strong advocate for employees (Stankeviciute & Savaneviciene, 2018), through collaborative behavior, implementing decent working conditions, equality, anti-discrimination measures and leadership training (Roca-Puig, 2019; Strenitzerová & Achimský, 2019; Wang & Yang, 2021). Still discussing behavior and training, HR emerges in a study by Sustainable HRM as a possible “technological innovator” when using social network analysis to study employee training behavior (Zhang et al., 2019).

As a “conflict mediator,” HR plays a key role in detecting early signs of employee problems and taking them to management to take opportune measures and avoid turnover (Xu et al., 2020); support line managers in supervising and encouraging sustainable behavior in the work context (Pellegrini et al., 2018), avoiding conflicts when providing help to outplace dismissed employees (Babeřová, Stareček, Cagaňová, Fero, & Čambál, 2019), and by establishing family support policies, as in the example of Hong and Kim (2019), to attract high-quality expatriate candidates. In this way, HR assists in the formulation of policies, planning, implementation, auditing, correction of actions and performance evaluation, and implementation of an explicit structure to manage sustainability (Chams & García-Blandón, 2019), actions that mitigate conflicts.

Finally, studies by Sustainable HRM show HR as a “strategic partner” when it develops and motivates people seeking to improve organizational performance, ensuring the sustainability of the business (Gardas et al., 2019). It should also develop sustainable and functional business strategies that focus on employee succession.

### **Sustainable HRM praxis characteristics in Business Partner (BP) research papers**

In our search we found 9 studies (53%) about BP that include *Praxis* of Sustainable HRM (is what plan the strategy). BP studies showed some praxis characteristics of Sustainable HRM: Beware of Employees, Employee Participation & Social Dialogue, External Partnership and Employee Cooperation. However, some characteristics were not found: Long-term orientation, Care for the environment, Profitability, Employee development, Flexibility, Compliance beyond labor regulations and Justice & equality.

**TABLE 6: BP papers that include Sustainable HRM “Praxis” characteristics**

<i>Sustainable HRM characteristics</i>	N. papers Praxis	Papers about BP
<b>Long-Term Orientation</b>	Praxis: --	---
<b>Beware of Employees</b>	Praxis: 2	Cristiani & Peiró, 2018; Ulrich, 2020
<b>Care for the Environment</b>	Praxis: --	---
<b>Profitability</b>	Praxis: --	---
<b>Employee Participation &amp; Social Dialogue</b>	Praxis: 3	Yusliza et al., 2017; Pandey & Pattnaik, 2017; Francis & Baum, 2018
<b>Employee Development</b>	Praxis: --	---
<b>External Partnership</b>	Praxis: 1	Ulrich, 2020
<b>Flexibility</b>	Praxis: --	---
<b>Compliance beyond Labor Regulations</b>	Praxis: --	---
<b>Employee Cooperation</b>	Praxis: 3	Oppong, 2017; Sharma & Sengupta, 2018; Dhanpat et al., 2020
<b>Justice and Equality</b>	Praxis: --	---

Source: Author’s elaboration

“Employee Care” is shown when the BP positions itself becomes a defender of the employee and are developers of human capital, promoting person-centered HRM (Cristiani & Peiró, 2018). Additionally, HR participates in business dialogues, offering unique insights into talent, leadership, and organization, which is consistent with “Employee Participation and Social Dialogue” (Ulrich, 2020).

The “Employee Development” feature appears in a study that promotes electronic HR practices in green HR, such as in job description, performance evaluation, recruitment, rewards, selection, and training (Yusliza et al., 2017). Regarding development, Pandey and Pattnaik (2017) conclude that HR needs to be independent and agree that one of its focuses should be on development, in addition to planning and design of the organization.

Finally, “Employee Cooperation” occurred in activities such as working closely to hire candidates who were identified as high potential talents for succession in multinationals (Sharma & Sengupta, 2018), when a strategic leader engages with the HRBP to develop systemic vision skills and to understand the interaction of all parts (Dhanpat et al., 2020), and when HR partners with the line managers (Oppong, 2017).

### Practitioners Convergences

Practitioners are the actors who shape the practices (Whittington, 2006), that is, those involved in making the practice work. The BP brought seven different practitioners, while Sustainable HRM brought only three, as it is shown in table 7:

**TABLE 7: Distribution of BP and Sustainable HRM practitioners**

Practitioners	BP	Sust. HRM	BP authors	Sustainable HRM authors
Shared Service Center (SSC)	1	0	Szierbowski-Seibel & Kabst, 2018	---
Employees	1	12	Francis & Keegan, 2006	Tooranloo, Azadi, & Sayyahpoor, 2017; Stankeviciute, Z., & Savaneviciene, A. (2018a). Stankeviciute, Z., & Savaneviciene, A. (2018b); Pellegrini, Rizzi & Frey, 2018; Roca-Puig, 2019; Zhang, Guo, Lei & Lim, 2019; Hong & Kim, 2019; Babel'ová, Stareček, Cagáňová, Fero & Čambál, 2019; Li, Sun & Li, 2019; Babel'ová et al., 2020; Ragmoun & Alwehabie, 2020; Muñoz-Pascuala & Galende, 2020
Line manager/ leadership	5	5	Oppong, 2017; Heizmann & Fox, 2017; Nadeem, & Aziz, 2018; Francis, & Baum, 2018; Dhanpat, Buthelezi, Joe, Maphela, & Shongwe, 2020	Tooranloo et al., 2017; Pellegrini et al., 2018; Strenitzerová, Achimský, 2019; Chams, Garcia-Blandón, 2019; Li, Sun & Li, 2019
HRBP	13	0	Kellner, Townsend & Wilkinson, 2016; Yusliza, Othmaz & Jabbour, 2017; Sharma & Sengupta, 2017; Oppong, 2017; Szierbowski-Seibel & Kabst, 2018; Nadeem, & Aziz, 2018; Hale, Norgate & Traeger, 2018; Francis, Baum & 2018; Strohmeier, 2018; Cristiani & Peiró, 2018; Ulrich, 2020; Dhanpat, et al., 2020; Mahadevan & Schmitz, 2020	---
HR Professional (non-BP)	1	21	Sheehan et al., 2016	Tooranloo et al., 2017; Savanevi & Stankevi, 2018; Stankevi & Savanevi, 2018; Pellegrini et al., 2018; Roca-Puig, 2019; Gardas et al., 2019; Zhang, Sun, Zheng & Liu, 2019; Zhang, Guo, Lei & Lim, 2019; Hong & Kim, 2019; Strenitzerová &

				Achimský, 2019; Babel'ová, Stareček, Cagáňová, Fero, & Čambál, 2019; Li, Sun & Li, 2019; Almarzooqi, Khan, M & Khalid, 2019; Chams, Garcia-Blandón, 2019; Li, Sun, 2019; Wang & Tseng, 2019; Babel'ová et al., 2020; Davidescu et al., 2020; Ragmoun & Alwehabie, 2020; Sorribes, Celma & Martínez-Garcia, 2020; Muñoz-Pascuala, Galende, 2020; Wang & Yang, 2021
<b>IT professional</b>	1	0	Strohmeier, 2018	---
<b>Company</b>	1	10	Mahadevan & Schmitz, 2020	Tooranloo et al., 2017; Savanevi & Stankevi, 2018; Stankevi & Savanevi, 2018; Pellegrini et al., 2018; Roca-Puig, 2019; Almarzooqiet al., 2019; Wang & Tseng, 2019; Ragmouna & Alwehabie, 2020; Sorribes et al., 2020; Muñoz-Pascuala & Galende, 2020
<b>Vice president</b>	1	0	Forsten-Astikainen, et al., 2017	---

Source: Authors' elaboration

The most common practitioner dimension used in both BP and sustainable HRM categories was the line manager and leadership in general. Both bring in their studies the line manager/leadership as important for the success of the model (Chams & García-Blandón, 2019; Dhanpat et al., 2020; Francis & Baum, 2018; Heizmann & Fox, 2017; Nadeem & Aziz, 2017; 2018; Oppong, 2017; Pellegrini et al., 2018; Sharma & Sengupta, 2018; Tooranloo et al., 2017).

In BP articles, the HRBP professional appears as a specific HR professional, only one BP article mentions other HR professionals (in addition to the HRBP professional); on the other hand, no article by Sustainable HRM mentions the BP professional, but mentions the HR professional as the main practitioner of this model.

Employees appear only in one of the BP articles, which corroborates the idea of Francis & Keegan (2006) when they criticize the fact that the BP is close to the strategy but distant from the employees. In contrast, "employees" appear in 12 articles by Sustainable HRM, which reinforces and can help legitimize the characteristics of this model that are aimed at employees, such as "Employee care," "Employee participation, and Social dialogue," "Employee development," "Compliance beyond labor regulations" and "Employee cooperation."

The "company" as a practitioner appeared in only one of the BP articles, but appeared in ten of the Sustainable HRM articles. Thus, it is possible to assume that Sustainable HRM is more likely to be successfully deployed, together with BP, to meet the interests of the organization and employees, than if it is deployed alone.

Following the analysis of more practitioners, it is natural that the Shared service center (the SSC) appears only in BP articles, as this model emphasizes that tasks, seen as transactional HR, are assigned to a specific area (such as the SSC or IT systems in the form of self-service portals) so that, it does not take the focus of HR away from being close to the strategy (Mahadevan & Schmitz, 2020); the BP characteristic of being close to the strategy may even explain the fact that the "vice-president" appears as a BP practitioner.

It is possible to assume that there is a greater chance that Sustainable HRM operationalized through the BP meets the interests of the organization and employees more than if implemented isolated. However, it will only be possible to understand whether it is correct to say that BP and Sustainable HRM together serve the interests of both employees and organizations, if there is an analysis of the merging of BP and Sustainable HRM in practice.

The convergence of characteristics of practices, praxis, and practitioners between BP and Sustainable HRM can help in the implementation of the SDGs, especially the SDGs 5) Gender equality; 8) decent work and economic growth; 10) reduction of inequalities; 12) responsible consumption and production; 16) peace, justice, and effective institutions.

### **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS: THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION, PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

This study brought theoretical advances and practical contributions, as well as research limitations and a proposed agenda for future studies.

About **theoretical contribution**, this study uses the Strategy-as-a-Practice theory to implement sustainable HRM model via BP and relates the characteristics, practices, praxis and practitioners of BP with sustainability. It expands the BP literature in an unprecedented way, relating it to the Sustainable HRM model.

Referring to **practical implications**, the study provides an interrelational framework for organizations to redirect the way to contribute to the implementation of Sustainable HRM, and contributes to the implementation of an emerging and necessary model of sustainability in HR using the established BP model.

This study is not without **limitations**; it doesn't propose a step-by-step approach to implementing Sustainable HRM via BP. Also, it only include studies fully available and published in the last 5 years. it only uses secondary data sources. Furthermore a survey was not carried out asking companies if the BP makes the implementation of Sustainable HRM feasible.

So, we suggest as **future directions**, to carry out a survey asking companies whether they have BP and Sustainable HRM concurrently; if they follow the BP and Sustainable HRM model. Furthermore check if one model complements and helps the other one. We can also advice experiments to implement Sustainable HRM via BP and analyze how BP can effectively contribute to solving sustainability challenges.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

We found specific characteristics for the BP and Sustainable HRM. All the praxis and practices characteristics of the BP were found in articles by Sustainable HRM. However, the Sustainable HRM characteristics "flexibility" and "justice and equality" were not found in BP articles. This divergence can be an opportunity for the BP to improve when operationalizing the Sustainable HRM, after all, one does not necessarily need to exclude the other one, but rather complement each other.

The choice of the organization of a sustainability strategy will require the HR area to conduct activities to support change, such as aligning HR policies and practices with sustainability indicators.

This research reveals important theoretical and practical contributions to research and performance in HR Management, by understanding the evolution between two HR models, which already have the aforementioned convergences, and there is the possibility of complementarity of the two models, being that Sustainable HRM (external/internal model) can bring greater flexibility, fairness and equality to the BP model (internal/external model) and the BP can bring Sustainable HRM closer to strategies and line managers. We can concluded, therefore, that BP and Sustainable HRM have convergent and complementary characteristics and will possibly have better results together than in isolation.

Although it does not exist in the literature, the fact that there was no identification of an organization that implemented Sustainable HRM with the help of the BP is a limitation of this study, as it is impossible to evaluate the results of this proposal in practice; only studies from the last 5 years were selected, so there may be studies that do not meet this criteria, but that may relate BP function and Sustainable HRM. Additionally, the study uses secondary data sources, and the companies were not asked whether the BP makes the implementation of Sustainable HRM feasible. This research does not propose, neither, how a step by step should be to implement Sustainable HRM via BP function.

It is not possible to state with this study that Sustainable HRM is an evolution of strategic HR, of which BP is part of it. However, the two models share similarities, such as connecting the strategies of the corporation to HR practices, seeking flexibility, and changing stakeholder attitudes, boosting business performance, influencing strategy, managing changes, and improving the implementation of SDGs in organizations.

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