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WORKING TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY: ALIGNING STRATEGY WITH OPERATIONS.

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Abstract: With the introduction of strategic corporate sustainability policies, companies are expected to improve various issues, including those related to work, providing greater well-being for their workers. Within the context of production engineering, it was sought to connect the theme of sustainability with the theme of work, the latter contemplated by the discipline of ergonomics. Through case studies developed in four companies considered as a benchmark in sustainability, it was analyzed how the introduction of the sustainability theme influenced work related issues, from the disclosure in the external and internal of the organization, through the analysis of the organizational means of unfolding , until the project design phase. This last phase is the moment in which the work in the organization is prescribed. It is expected that the company engaged in sustainability will devote a position of relevance to the worker and his well-being at this stage. The case studies were essential to confirm seven propositions, which allowed to confirm the doctoral thesis, "Although they are disclosed as included, there is no explicit evidence that changes in work are considered during the introduction of sustainability policies." From this research result, the contributions that can be provided by the discipline of ergonomics in companies to increase the effectiveness of the introduction of labor issues in their systemic sustainability policies are discussed, allowing an alignment between what is disclosed and what really is introduced in organizations.

Keywords: Work, corporate sustainability, ergonomics

1. INTRODUCTION

The theme of sustainability originates from the international discussion on solving humanity's major problems and is connected to the concept of sustainable development. Concerns about the future of humanity are perceived by public opinion, as well as by large corporations, which have included corporate sustainability (CS) policies in their actions. Based on the concept of Triple Bottom Line (TBL) introduced by Elkington (1997), a sustainable company is one that is concerned with jointly taking care of social, economic and environmental aspects. This vision is the one adopted by the largest global initiatives that promote the inclusion of sustainability issues within organizations, such as the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) or the United Nations Global Compact (GC). In this context, work is one of the aspects highlighted in the introduction of corporate sustainability policies, specifically discussing social sustainability actions within the organization (GRI, 2014; ISO, 2010). Work-related issues currently considered in corporate sustainability or Corporate Social Responsibility policies are: human rights; labor and employment relations; working conditions and social protection; social dialogue with and between government representatives and employers; health and safety at Work; human development and training in the workplace (GRI, 2014; ISO, 2010). Issues related to work are introduced into CS policies because there is an effective interest in the well-being of workers, it increases the organization's performance, improves the corporate image and there is work so that the company can become sustainable (BOLIS; BRUNORO; SZNELWAR, 2014b) and, according to the concept of sweet spots (SAVITZ; WEBER, 2007), there are reciprocal benefits with the other dimensions of sustainability. Committed companies include corporate sustainability among their policies

strategies deploying it throughout the organization with the aim of modifying its product and service production

processes.

There are, however, signs that once the sustainability strategy is deployed at the tactical and operational level, the systemic objective of the initial intention may end up being lost. Aimed at the business world of reference in the introduction of sustainability policies, this article aims to answer three main research questions:

- What are the concepts of sustainability disseminated and introduced in organizations, and how does the issue of work fit into the context of corporate sustainability?
- Can the organizational means used to disseminate sustainability within the company fully implement sustainability policies throughout the organization?
- In the work design, are tasks designed considering strategic sustainability policies regarding work issues?

The research questions are functional to confirm the thesis of this research, that is, although they are disclosed as included, there is no explicit evidence that changes in work are considered during the introduction of sustainability policies.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research was developed through case studies. A first phase allowed us to understand the perceptions of professionals in the areas of sustainability, engineering and human resources from ten multinational companies, characterized as being active in the UN Global Compact initiative and operating in Brazil. As these are only professional perceptions and are not complemented by other evidence, the data collected only generated exploratory results. Based

Based on the information collected, the second phase focused on developing a more in-depth case study. Based on the research needs and the opportunities found by the researcher, 4 companies that were references in the market were chosen for their corporate sustainability policies. Criteria for selecting the companies were as follows: explicitly disclose the incorporation of sustainability concepts into their practices, use the guidelines of the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), directly employ more than 5000 people. The objective of the case study was to extract information (1) about corporate sustainability strategies and

their relationships with work-related issues; (2) about the organizational means used by companies to deploy sustainability strategies in the organization; (3) and about the degree of inclusion of concerns regarding work-related issues in the work project phase. Such information was collected through at least three of the following four research activities: consultation of corporate websites and sustainability reports; interviews with those responsible for the corporate areas of sustainability, engineering and HR; interviews with workers in the areas of sustainability, engineering and HR (or other areas that could provide useful information for research) with low impact on the definition of business strategy; and study of specific and delimited cases of changes resulting from the introduction of sustainability projects.

4. RESULTS

The case studies allowed the structured collection of various empirical data. The first research question seeks to find out what sustainability concepts are disseminated and introduced in organizations and how the issue of work fits into the context of corporate sustainability. Corporations are dedicating a lot of space to publicizing the topic of sustainability (BOLIS;

BRUNORO; SZNELWAR, 2014) in its communication channels (corporate website, sustainability reports, etc.) and in its participation in local and global events and initiatives (GRI, 2014; UNGC, 2014). This is visible in the involvement of senior management, with in many cases the presidents being the main sponsors. In the companies analyzed, terms such as corporate sustainability, CSR, sustainable development and the generic "sustainability" appear frequently, although they do not seem to have specific meanings, being used in many cases as synonyms. Although the terminology is not aligned with the literature, as already confirmed by (LOZANO, 2012) organizations are aware of their role in introducing issues related to sustainable development within their operations. Within the TBL concept disclosed by organizations, information regarding workers is always included. It is believed that caring for workers can generate great benefits for companies and society, in

line with the sweet-spot vision (SAVITZ; WEBER, 2007). Answering the first research question in a proposition: companies that are engaged and reference in sustainability disclose a systemic vision in their corporate sustainability strategies.

The second research question sought to determine whether the organizational means used to disseminate sustainability within the company can fully implement sustainability policies throughout the organization. The companies analyzed in the case studies have introduced dedicated departments to be the focal point of sustainability within the organization. The evidence collected in the analysis of the activities of sustainability departments shows that the environmental aspect is predominant. These departments have the power to define environmental objectives and manage them so that they are respected. In relation to other non-environmental sustainability objectives, the area only has a support and awareness role. This limited action by the sustainability department can be detrimental to all dimensions of sustainability.

be introduced with the same priority within the organization. Furthermore, as also discussed by Gibson (2006), by dividing the responsibility of the environmental, social and environmental pillars into different areas there is a risk of disregarding the interdependence that exists between the pillars. The use of organizational culture to internally disseminate sustainability concepts is common among the companies analyzed. Due to lack of information, it was not possible to confirm that all dimensions of sustainability were disclosed in an integrated manner through the organizational culture. Focusing on work issues, what can be questioned is the purpose of organizational culture within the context of sustainability. This organizational means can be a great way to publicize the topic of sustainability in a systemic and integrated way. However, when it is explicitly disclosed in a top-down manner that there are ethical and moral foundations that guide the practice of members, that the corporate culture is introduced so that workers can align their interests with those of the company, or that it forms individuals To be agents of change, doubts may arise about the alignment

between what is disclosed in the company and the real purpose of the organizational culture. As already described by Holmqvist (2009) and Béthoux, Didry and Mias (2007), the company's objective may be more related to obtaining social control in the organization and protecting the company's assets, rather than benefiting workers. In the performance management process, there are attempts by the companies analyzed to include sustainability considering all its dimensions based on the TBL concept. However, there was a great distance between the detailing of environmental objectives and the detailing of social objectives (summarized in health and safety indicators and the organizational climate indicator). Furthermore, from the interviews, it was noted that companies had difficulties in integrating sustainability dimensions into their performance management. Eco-efficiency goals do not seem, for example, linked in any way to social goals such as organizational climate. Discussing the projects, the

Evidence collected from the interviews shows that the projects' predominant (and practically only) motivation is the economic-financial issue. When improvement is associated with the term "sustainability" it is predominantly aimed at environmental improvements. The evaluation and prioritization of the implementation of projects results from the analysis of some aspects, the main ones being economic, environmental (with several indicators) and occupational safety. In addition to this last aspect, issues related to work in the context of sustainability do not appear when proposing and evaluating a project. As described by Young and Thyl (2009), when introducing sustainability actions, the emphasis seems to be on the environmental and financial sphere, giving less importance to relations with employees. Even Lozano (2012), analyzing different tools, approaches and voluntary sustainability initiatives, observed the predominance of care in the environmental sphere. Summarizing the answer to the second research question in one point: the deployment of the strategy does not address all issues associated with sustainability (such as work) in an integrated manner throughout the organization.

Regarding the third research question, we first need to discuss two important considerations: sustainability policies have brought changes to workers' tasks and without work there is no corporate sustainability. The first proposition can be considered an obvious consequence, since changes in tasks can result from any new business strategy (quality improvement, cost reduction, etc.). It was observed that in some cases of changing more sustainable processes there was a transition from tasks with a high physical load to tasks with a greater psycho-cognitive load, others were characterized by the introduction of additional tasks into the work routine, another (cases of cooperative members) caused a change in the routine of daily life, and in general, all companies introduced new professional figures, or adapted existing ones, so that they specifically address the issue. This first consideration is extremely important, because companies must understand that any sustainability change, whether economic or environmental, also has an impact on work tasks. This impact must be considered appropriately so that when planning changes, economic or environmental improvements are integrated with social improvements and, more specifically, work-related issues. The second consideration may also seem obvious: sustainability would not exist without the work of people. There are many types of work that create sustainability: the work of people in business leadership who need to have commitment and engagement to make the strategic decision to introduce the topic of sustainability into the organization; the work of people in sustainability departments who coordinate the efforts of all units; the work of people who manage projects and products, allowing strategic policies to be transformed into actions; and the operational work of people who work to carry out sustainability actions on a daily basis and which can also result in a valuable source of suggestions for sustainability improvements. This consideration is also extremely important, by giving importance to the worker and his role, the introduction of sustainability within the company can be encouraged. A more engaged worker can promote new sustainability actions for the company and society even more strongly. As already written by Wehrmeyer (1996) only through the energy, performance and personal commitment of each employee within an organization, can

a business move towards sustainable industrial development.

Although these two premises were confirmed in the companies, no improvements or additional analyzes were found related to the issue of work between sustainability projects and other projects, and between projects before and after the intensification of concerns about sustainability in companies. Care is partial and linked to classic procedures

business. This finding is confirmed by the 8 cases of process changes where worker participation was proactive only in the cases of continuous improvement projects, where by nature proactive suggestions from workers are included and considered valuable in the design of new processes (IMAI, 1996). The emancipation of a person involved in the process of redefining the work project turns out to be the main means of including improvements in work issues for greater sustainability. Although there is literature confirming that employees are the key to long-term sustainable operations, being one of the primary and vital stakeholders for business profits (YOUNG; THYIL, 2009), in practice companies do not give them a voice in operationalizing this contribution. The answer to the third research question can be summarized as follows: in the work design phase, tasks are defined independently of the discussion of sustainability, without explicitly introducing concern for the well-being of the worker.

The answers to the research questions suggest that sustainability strategies were not introduced to explicitly change the task itself, but to change production in a broader way towards a general sustainability policy (mainly linked to economic-financial and environmental improvements).). These process changes may have caused improvements in workers' activities. However, these improvements were not something previously thought of during planning, but rather were a consequence. The concept of sustainability should be introduced in an integrated and interdependent way (GIBSON, 2006), differently from how it was observed. These considerations lead to confirming the initial thesis of the research: although they are announced as included, there is no explicit

evidence that changes in work are considered during the introduction of sustainability policies.

As advised by Norman and MacDonald (2004) and Tullberg (2012), the theme of sustainability linked to work should not be restricted to indicators of

global initiatives. The issue of sustainability brings new challenges. It is necessary to extend the discussion to a greater consideration of the role of work in this topic. It is believed that the premises of sustainability have axiological issues at their origin (BOLIS; MORIOKA; SZNELWAR, 2014), which go beyond the functional use of resources to increase the economic-financial performance of organizations. In this context, there are already academic contributions that connect ergonomics and sustainability (HASLAM; WATERSON, 2013) and that identify the presence of values that can be shared between the two disciplines (LANGE-MORALES; THATCHER; GARCÍA-ACOSTA, 2014).

To enable this relationship, ergonomics needs to break with the current positivist and empiricist philosophy (DEKKER; HANCOCK; WILKIN, 2013) enabling a more systemic approach in the design of sustainable work systems (ZINK, 2014). In particular, based on the results of this research, ergonomics needs to open its borders to be able to increase its influence in organizations. Ergonomists should participate in the process of defining strategic corporate sustainability policies, or, at least, question their results within the organization. The work design phase plays a fundamental role in building the well-being of workers within organizations (ABRAHÃO et al., 2009; FALZON, 2007; GUÉRIN et al., 2001). Can Helping the organization consider this phase based on corporate sustainability policies could bring enormous benefits and positive impulses to the action and role of ergonomics within organizations.

3. CONCLUSION

Some academic works already discuss the topic of work in the context of sustainability, but in specific circumstances. The present work wanted to investigate companies engaged in sustainability with the purpose of generalizing

the relationship that organizations

have to do with work issues in the context of corporate sustainability policies. The research showed some weaknesses that are expected to be addressed in the future so that organizations can align their disclosed intentions with their practices. Another contribution of the thesis is the incentive for work to once again establish its central role within organizations. It is people and their work that create services and products, and their performance is crucial to the performance of organizations. Not considering these subjects in the effective introduction of sustainability can be a risk. It is believed that people's engagement is the best way for organizations to continue to be sustainable over time, in the solutions implemented and in their economic success in the market.

One of the limitations of research in the area of sustainability based on perceptions is the possible bias of interviewees in seeking answers that are politically correct and that do not necessarily portray the company's reality. To try to reduce this effect, data collection was conducted in order to triangulate perspectives from different points of view, as well as published data and data referring to concrete and specific projects. Another limitation was the existence of great difficulty for the researcher in gaining access to information and people in the organizations. This difficulty limited the number of companies analyzed, the opening to interview more departments within the organizations, the accessibility to workers in the operational area and the accessibility to workers from outsourced companies.

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