

# Implementation of strategic human resource management: challenges of a public enterprise

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## Abstract

This study explores the factors related to the difficulties of implementing strategic human resource management policies. The objective is to identify the institutional, political, organizational, and sectoral factors that may interfere in the implementation of strategic human resource management policies in the case of a public enterprise according to contingency categories found in the literature. Qualitative research using documentary research and interviews was carried out, and the data were analyzed through content analysis. The results indicate that the main interfering factors are related to i) cultural aspects, due to the profile of the organization employees; ii) political aspects, because strategic projects tend to be discontinued in the organization; and iii) sectorial aspects, since the human resource management unit has low credibility, reputation, and autonomy. In conclusion, the implementation of strategic human resource management policies is mainly a process of cultural change.

**KEYWORDS:** Strategic human resource management. Implementation of human resource management policies. Public administration.

Article submitted on June 10, 2019 and accepted for publication on November 30, 2019.  
[Translated version] Note: All quotes in English translated by this article's translator.  
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.12660/rgplp.v18n3.2019.79484>



## Implementação da gestão estratégica de pessoas: desafios enfrentados por uma empresa pública

### Resumo

Diante da percebida dificuldade para implementar políticas estratégicas de gestão de pessoas (GP), este estudo explora quais são os fatores que contribuem para tal dificuldade. O artigo identifica fatores contextuais de natureza institucional, política, organizacional e setorial que podem interferir na implementação de políticas de gestão estratégica de pessoas (GEP) no caso de uma empresa pública, segundo categorias de contingências levantadas previamente na literatura. Trata-se de pesquisa com abordagem qualitativa e uso de entrevistas e pesquisa documental. Os dados foram submetidos a análise de conteúdo. Os resultados indicam que os principais fatores interferentes se relacionam a aspectos: a) culturais, devido ao perfil dos empregados da empresa; b) políticos, pois na empresa os projetos estratégicos tendem a ser descontinuados; e c) setoriais, pois a unidade de GP goza de baixa credibilidade, reputação e autonomia. Conclui-se que iniciativas de implementação de políticas de GEP constituem, sobretudo, um processo de mudança cultural.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Gestão estratégica de pessoas. Implementação de políticas de gestão de pessoas. Gestão pública.

## Implementación de la gestión estratégica de personas: desafíos enfrentados por una empresa pública

### Resumen

Frente a la dificultad percibida de implementar políticas estratégicas de gestión de personas, este estudio explora qué factores de interferencia contribuyen a estas dificultades. Este artículo pretende identificar los factores institucionales, políticos, organizacionales y sectoriales que pueden interferir en la implementación de políticas de gestión estratégica de personas en el caso de una empresa pública según categorías de contingencia previamente planteadas por la literatura. Se realizó una investigación cualitativa, en la cual se emplearon investigaciones documentales y entrevistas. Los datos se analizaron mediante análisis de contenido. Los resultados indican que los principales factores de interferencia están relacionados con aspectos: i) culturales, debido al perfil de los empleados de la organización; ii) políticos, porque los proyectos estratégicos tienden a ser discontinuados en la organización; y iii) sectoriales, ya que la unidad de gestión de personas tiene baja credibilidad, reputación y autonomía. En conclusión, la implementación de políticas de gestión estratégica de personas es sobre todo un proceso de cambio cultural.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Gestión estratégica de personas. Implementación de políticas de gestión de personas. Administración pública.

## INTRODUCTION

Beginning in the 1980s, human resource management (HRM) gained greater relevance with the emergence of a vision of people as a strategic factor for an organization (LEGGÉ, 1995). According to this approach, denominated *strategic human resource management* (SHRM), the unit responsible for human resources has to guarantee the competitiveness of the organization by realizing the potential of the human skills necessary for good organizational performance (WRIGHT and SNELL, 1991).

This understanding, eminently developed by the private sector, is that HRM has shown itself to be fundamental to organizational effectiveness, and this was also adopted by the public sector with the coming of the managerialist scenario established by administrative reforms at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (TRUSS, 2008). Within this context, a process of reforming the State also took place, which sought to substitute a rigidly bureaucratic and paternalistic model with another, marked by the adoption of typical elements of managerial public administration, in response to the crisis of the State in the 1980s and the globalization of the economy. Actions designed to redefine the State in the sense of coming to favor international economic competition were adapted to the normative rigidity established by the Federal Constitution of 1988 (PEREIRA, 2006). Decades later, the National Development of Personnel Policy (NDPP), instituted by Decree no. 5,707/2006, was the principal and broadest initiative in regard to HRM with the purpose of adopting *skills management* as a tool in the training of civil servants in the Federal Executive Branch (CAMÕES and MENESES, 2016; SILVA and MELLO, 2013).

However, the transposition of the strategic HRM models developed by the private sector has occurred without observing the public sector's complexities (BROWN, 2004; INGRAHAM and RUBAII-BARRETT 2007). In importing HRM techniques, the fact was not taken into consideration that the strategic, structural and cultural environment of public organizations may be limited to initiatives of the HRM units, which in the implementation process end up running into institutional, political, organizational and sectoral factors which were neglected in the formulation of these initiatives (FONSECA, MENESES, SILVA FILHO et al., 2013; CÔRTEZ, 2016).

The adjustment of HRM practices and the conditions found within organizations constitutes one of the main principles of SHRM, whether it involves the need to align sectoral and organizational policies disseminated by initial field studies, or the later understanding of contextual contingencies, such as the organization's type and sector, which also are determinant of the success of these practices (M. L. LENGNICK-HALL, C. A. LENGNICK-HALL, ANDRADE et al., 2009). Above all in the case of the public sector, contingency and political aspects constitute a central element to the implementation of HRM policies occurring as planned (CAMÕES and MENESES, 2016; CÔRTEZ and MENESES, 2017).

In view of the finding that there is a distance between the intended practices and those which are realized, the implementation of SHRM constitutes one of the main lines of the research agenda about this subject (M. L. LENGNICK-HALL, C. A. LENGNICK-HALL, ANDRADE et al., 2009).

With this in mind, this study consists of information about the influence of the context of HRM practices in a public enterprise. Thus, the objective is identifying contextual factors which can interfere with the implementation of HRM policies in a public enterprise.

## Strategic human resource management

Even though discussions about the strategic utilization of HRM have been present since the 1920s, it was within a scenario that demanded more of an organization's competitive potential that SHRM emerged (WRIGHT and MCMAHAN, 1992; KAUFMAN, 2015; CAMÕES and MENESES, 2016). Within this context, HRM gained greater projection based on the recognition of human resources as being valuable to the fulfillment of organizational strategy (WRIGHT and MCMAHAN, 1992; JACKSON, SCHULER and JIANG, 2014). The concept of SHRM basically aggregates two principles: a) vertical alignment; and b) horizontal alignment – based on which they seek to increase the potential of recruiting, retaining and developing the functional corps of the skills that the organization needs, through cohesion between HRM policies and subsystems, and consistency in relation to the organization's objectives (WRIGHT and SNELL, 1991; WRIGHT and MCMAHAN, 1992).

Together with the ascension of SHRM, ideas of modernization in public management gained force, such as the rational use of resources to promote greater efficiency and effectiveness and stimulate competitiveness (HOOD, 1995). Thus, human resources management began to receive greater attention within the public sector, given that the new approaches to the area were designed to improve effectiveness and serve as drivers of a performance-based culture (TRUSS, 2008).

Even though some of the managerial practices transposed from the private sector have proved useful, they have raised problematic issues for the public sector, such as the greater influence of verified policies and bureaucratic cultural values, leading to a hybrid HRM model, incapable of substituting the traditional *human resource administration* (HRA) model (DUNLEAVY and HOOD, 1994; R. B. DENHARDT and J. V. DENHARDT, 2003; TRUSS, 2008; MOTTA, 2013). In sum, the contextual differences between these two sectors and the impact that they exercise on HRM activities are evident, ratifying the idea that the study of these activities should not occur removed from the context of public administration (TRUSS, 2008; MOTTA, 2013; SILVA and MELLO, 2013).

In fact, the observation of this context constitutes one of the central elements of differentiation between SHRM and HRA, bearing in mind that when adopting a strategic position it is relevant to have a systemic notion of an organization and the interdependence that it maintains with the environment that surrounds it (JACKSON, SCHULER and JIANG, 2014). In this sense, the literature regarding SHRM is mainly based on this principle, according to the contingency perspective, or in other words, based on the notion that the adjustment of HRM models is necessary in every case, given that the internal and external environmental factors represent contingencies to the implementation of SHRM policies (HENDRY and PETTIGREW, 1990; DELERY and DOTY, 1996; M. L. LENGNICK-HALL, C. A. LENGNICK-HALL, ANDRADE et al., 2009).

## Implementation of strategic human resources management in the public sector

With the advance of the literature in terms of the concepts, models and recommendations regarding SHRM, the effective capacity of implementing SHRM policies in the 1990s came to constitute the main subject of the research agenda regarding this area. Based on the conclusion that there is a distance between planned practices and those which in fact are executed, as well as an understanding that HRM sectors have not been very successful in implementing SHRM principles, there has arisen the need to examine in greater detail the factors that contribute to this reality (TRUSS and GRATTON, 1994; M. L. LENGNICK-HALL, C. A. LENGNICK-HALL, ANDRADE et al., 2009).

Faced with this research problem, Brazilian studies have sought to identify aspects that interfere with the implementation of distinct SHRM policies in the Brazilian public sector, with a focus on an investigation of the results obtained after the implementation of the NDPP (FONSECA, 2013; CAMÕES, 2013). In accordance with the conclusions proposed by these studies, Côrtes (2016) realized a bibliographic review with the objective of identifying and categorizing these contingencies in the implementation of the SHRM in the public sector as covered by the literature, which were later examined empirically within the context of the Legislative Branch (CÔRTEES and MENESES, 2019). In this sense, Côrtes and Meneses (2019) propose that the main challenges faced can be summarized with 21 factors, divided into categories based on their nature: a) institutional; b) political; c) organizational; and d) sectoral – identified by Fonseca (2013) and Camões (2013).

The institutional factors deal with components of the external environment of public organizations which influence their functioning, whether they establish barriers to the implementation of SHRM due to excessive regulation or encourage the adoption of coercive imposition (DECRAMER, SMOLDERS, VANDERSTRAETEN et al., 2012; FONSECA, 2013). In this sense, they can include: a) aspects of the conjunction of politics, economics and society; b) interference from external control mechanisms; and c) limitations due to external legislation, decrees, and norms (SILVA and MELLO, 2013; CÔRTEES and MENESES, 2019; FONSECA and MENESES, 2016).

Political factors, in turn, address interpersonal and intergroup relationships experienced in an organization and the way in which they affect the formation of an agenda and decision making. They therefore include issues related to strategic and negotiating ability and the use of influence to guarantee the implementation and continuity of SHRM policies, even when faced with conflicts of interest verified by the discrepancy of priorities between the upper level of administration and civil servants (INGRAHAM and RUBAII-BARRETT, 2007; CAMÕES and MENESES, 2016; CÔRTEES and MENESES, 2019).

Other organizational factors characterize the internal environment of organizations. Among the subjects studied are the impacts that the utilization of resources and the definition of a hierarchical structure, internal norms, and strategic planning can exercise on the implementation of SHRM. Moreover, it includes issues such as the culture of resistance to change and the bureaucratic values instituted in public administration (SILVA and MELLO, 2013; FONSECA and MENESES, 2016; CÔRTEES and MENESES, 2019).

Finally, sectoral factors are elements of the HRM unit which affect the effectiveness of its actions, both in terms of the availability of resources and structure and aspects related to the

strategic and political character of the unit. Thus, they can also encompass issues of reputation and the HRM unit's autonomy, given that the freedom of action of the sector and the vision of the functional corps in relation to it, tend to be restricted and negative in the public sector (JÄRVALT and RANDMA-LIIV, 2010; CÔRTEES and MENESES, 2019; FONSECA, 2013).

Text Table 1 summarizes the categories that make up each of the factors, as well as the definitions proposed by Camões (2013), Fonseca (2013) and Côrtes (2016) adopted in this study. Therefore, this study seeks to verify within the interfering factors which are those which are relevant to the implementation of SHRM in the public enterprise under analysis.

**TEXT TABLE 1**  
**Summary of the definitions of interfering factors**

| Factors               | Categories                                  | Proposed constituent definition   |
|-----------------------|---|---|
| <b>Institutional</b>  | Societal aspects                            | Conjunction of macro-economics, politics and society.   |
|                       | External legislation and norms              | Consistency, constancy, unity, and completeness of the group of laws and norms produced outside the organization which govern subjects relative to HRM. |
|                       | External control mechanisms                 | Activities that verify and control the obedience of HRM rules.  |
| <b>Politics</b>       | Political configuration of the organization | Pattern of use of influence and political criteria in the formation of the agenda of the upper level of administration.                                 |
|                       | Support of the upper level administration   | Level of decision-making support in the providing of resources for HRM activities.  |
|                       | Administrative discontinuity                | Instability of political coalitions and mandates, and the turnover of managers.   |
|                       | Political ability of HRM leadership         | Capacity of the HRM leader to influence.  |
|                       | Strategic ability of the HRM unit           | Presence of the HRM unit in decision making arenas, with the ability to discuss, formulate, monitor and review proposals for the area.                  |
| <b>Organizational</b> | Cultural aspects                            | Predominant values and degree of resistance to change.  |
|                       | Organizational resources                    | Quantity and quality of human resources, technology and finance controlled by the organization.   |
|                       | Organizational structure                    | Structural configuration of the organization and the presence of governance mechanisms.   |
|                       | Engagement of managers and civil servants   | Involvement and participation of line managers and civil servants in HRM policies.  |
|                       | Institutional communication                 | Level of transparency in the availability of information.   |
|                       | Internal norms                              | HRM normative framework produced in the organization's internal context.  |
|                       | Organizational strategic planning           | Intentional and objective planning process which culminates in the organization's strategic plan.   |

*Continue*

| Factors         | Categories                                    | Proposed constituent definition  |
|-----------------|---|--|
|                 | Strategic integration of the HRM unit         | Interdependence between HRM subsystems and the consistency of these in terms of organizational strategy.               |
|                 | Reputation of the HRM unit                    | Perception of civil servants, managers, and the upper level of administration about the effectiveness of the HRM unit. |
|                 | Resources of the HRM unit                     | Quantity and quality of the human resources and materials controlled by the HRM unit.                                  |
| <b>Sectoral</b> | Autonomy of the HRM unit                      | Freedom of action of the HRM unit.   |
|                 | Structure of the HRM unit                     | Structural configuration of the HRM unit, involving its position in the organizational structure.                      |
|                 | Implementation methodology                    | Degree of appropriateness and complexity of the adopted HRM strategic model.   |
|                 | Coexistence of the HRM unit's functional role | Proportion of the division of time and effort by the HRM unit directed to its functional and strategic activities.     |

**Source:** Côrtes (2016, p.103) according to propositions of Fonseca (2013) and Camões (2013).

In consonance with the presented classification, a few interfering factors of an organizational nature merit the attention of this study given their predominance in the literature (FONSECA and MENESES, 2016; CÔRTEZ and MENESES, 2017). It is argued that the alignment necessary to favor the achievement of organizational objectives assumes the convergence of strategic, structural and cultural variables (SEMLER, 1997). Along this line of argument, the implementation of HRM strategic models is due to the realization of large-scale organizational changes (KAUFMAN, 2015), whose realization imposes alterations of a strategic, structural and cultural character (GUEST, 1987).

However, the discrepancy sometimes identified between strategic planning and that which is effectively realized comes from cultural causes (HARRISON and BAZZI, 2017), especially in public organizations (ALFES, TRUSS and GILL, 2010). Broadening this vision also argues that defining elements of culture, such as for example, values disseminated by the organization exercise an influence on the determination of assumptions in terms of its functioning and the conduct of its activities, which is reflected in the way it is structured (BARNEY, 1986). Equally, it is noted that the development of cultural elements which stimulate collective participation and human relations tend to mitigate the resistance to change, another critical element within this context (MARQUES, BORGES, MORAIS et al., 2014), and favor the adoption of new forms of realizing work (JONES, JIMMIESON and GRIFFITHS, 2005; ALFES, TRUSS and GILL, 2010).

The relevance of typical structural organizational aspects in public organizations also needs to be emphasized along with their impact on the effective adoption of strategic

HRM. The markedly rigid and bureaucratic structures also tend to restrict the dynamics of implementation (INGRAHAM and RUBAII-BARRETT, 2007). More specifically, the Brazilian context is marked by the predominance of formalistic bureaucracies with a strong concentration of power (PIRES and MACEDO, 2006), and the organizational structure is defined by norms which are derived by broad state management policies which do not contemplate the individual characteristics of administrative units (CAMÕES and MENESES, 2016; CÔRTEZ and MENESES, 2017).

Once the theoretical relevance of phenomenon under study is exposed, in addition to the theoretically possible factors which interfere with the implementation of the SHRM, we need to empirically investigate how they present themselves and are hierarchically organized within the reality of the analyzed organization.

## METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes a descriptive qualitative approach. It was applied to a national public enterprise headquartered in the Federal District which was created in 1990. Its objective is to execute agricultural and supply policies. The company employed, at the time of the data collection, approximately 5,000 employees, distributed among the head office and 27 regional affiliates; Text Table 2 summarizes the main methodological characteristics of this study.

TEXT TABLE 2

### Succinct description of the methods, procedures and techniques used in this study

| Approach    | Technique           | Source of Information  | Data Analysis                             |
|-------------|---------------------|--|---|
| Qualitative | Documental research | Physical and electronic official documents covering human resource management and other organizational units | Pre-categorical thematic content analysis |
|             | Interview           | Managers and employees selected due to their affinity with the research object                               | Pre-categorical thematic content analysis |

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

The first phase of the study consisted of gathering official documents which contain elements relevant to the understanding of the organizational and institutional context. The composition of this collection was originally based on indications of employees of one of the HRM units, responsible at the time of the data collection for the development and implementation of new technologies aligned with the SHRM policy being instituted by the organization. After the material analysis, other documents were added to the sample until theoretical saturation was achieved. In total, 70 documents were analyzed as presented in Table 1.



**TABLE 1**  
**Number of documents analyzed by type**

| Document type                    | Number of documents |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|
| Legal-normative apparatus        | 10                  |
| Labor orientations               | 10                  |
| Organizational norms             | 13                  |
| Organizational guidelines        | 8                   |
| Human resource management system | 20                  |
| Organizational reports           | 9                   |
| <b>Total</b>                     | <b>70</b>           |

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Then we initiated the interview phase of the study to complement and deepen our understanding of the elements expressed in these documents. This qualitative research regarding opinions was conducted in a collective manner with key actors, indicated by the employees of the consulted HRM unit, and these employees were also interviewed. The participants were selected in accordance with the pre-defined sample criteria: varied profiles in socio-demographic terms as well as in terms of the HRM units. These criteria were suggested to obtain the most representative sample possible of organization employees, bearing in mind that this company's employees range from positions that require primary education to those that require higher education, and consist of a wide variety of age groups and times of service. In addition, it was considered relevant to achieving our proposed objective to interview those who act directly in the implementation of SHRM, as well as subjects who are just clients of the practices developed by the HRM unit. In this sense, 10 collective interviews were conducted, resulting in 61 interviewees, representing 10 units of the enterprise. Then all the interviews were transcribed and each interview was submitted to content analysis in accordance with the procedures adopted by Bardin (2011): the systematic investigation of information through an initial reading, followed by the codification and categorization of excerpts related to the research object. Then these excerpts were categorized in accordance with previously established categories in the literature (Text Table 1) for institutional, political, organizational and sectoral factors (CAMÕES, 2013; FONSECA, 2013; CÔRTEZ, 2016; CÔRTEZ and MENESES, 2019). Finally, it should be noted that the analysis of each piece of information was realized by at least two researchers, with content being placed in one of the categories for analysis only when there was a convergence of opinion between the researchers.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results obtained via content analysis are summarized in Table 2, which presents the categories encountered with greater frequency, meaning the elements that constitute interfering factors more often.

**TABLE 2**  
**Frequency of the interfering factors by category**

| Factors        | Categories                                  | Frequency | Total      |
|----------------|---|-----------|------------|
| Institutional  | External legislation and norms              | 10        | 23         |
|                | External control mechanisms                 | 8         |            |
|                | Institutional relations <sup>(a)</sup>      | 5         |            |
|                | Societal aspects                            | 0         |            |
| Political      | Support of the upper level administration   | 14        | 43         |
|                | Political configuration of the organization | 12        |            |
|                | Administrative discontinuity                | 11        |            |
|                | Political ability of HRM leadership         | 3         |            |
|                | Strategic ability of the HRM unit           | 3         |            |
| Organizational | Cultural aspects                            | 65        | 151        |
|                | Organizational resources                    | 35        |            |
|                | Engagement of managers and civil servants   | 21        |            |
|                | Organizational structure                    | 9         |            |
|                | Internal norms                              | 9         |            |
|                | Organizational strategic planning           | 7         |            |
|                | Institutional communication                 | 5         |            |
| Sectoral       | Reputation of the HRM unit                  | 50        | 82         |
|                | Resources of the HRM unit                   | 14        |            |
|                | Implementation methodology                  | 6         |            |
|                | Strategic integration of the HRM unit       | 5         |            |
|                | Autonomy of the HRM unit                    | 3         |            |
|                | Structure of the HRM unit                   | 2         |            |
|                | Coexistence of HRM unit's functional role   | 2         |            |
| <b>TOTAL</b>   |   |           | <b>299</b> |

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

<sup>(a)</sup> New category (*ex post*).

First it should be noted that, among institutional factors, it was necessary to add a new category denominated “Institutional relations”. Even though this category doesn’t exist in the models proposed by Fonseca (2013) and Côrtes (2016), it was verified empirically and fits the scientific criteria adopted in the content analysis, such as exhaustiveness and pertinence. This new category focuses on the interactions of the organization with various groups and actors, giving special attention to the limits imposed by employee associations and unions, which make the implementation space of policies more complex. In consonance with this difficulty, Bach (2010)

emphasizes that the presence of conflicts of interest between distinct political and social actors is a characteristic of the public sector, given the variety of objectives which guide public organizations.

In general, organizational factors, especially those of a cultural nature have been considered the elements of greatest importance in research up until now. It is possible that these elements call attention to themselves due to desired organizational changes with the introduction of managerialist principles which support SHRM methodologies. The results indicate the absence of planned initiatives for the administration of culture, which are needed to make the alignment of strategic objectives viable (BERGUE, 2014). In this interim, HRM policies which reinforce compatible behavioral values, seeking to adjust organizational culture, are a prerequisite to mitigate obstacles of a cultural nature (GUEST, 1987).

In practical terms, the development and implementation of new management technologies cannot be restricted to the technical dimension, and should consider actions designed to interject behavioral references consistent with precepts of the modern organizational management of people, such as dialogue, feedback and cooperation. In this sense, employee consciousness initiatives and training for new work processes contribute to attenuating cultural shocks. Moreover, actions which favor the participation of civil servants in the change process can promote adhesion to new practices (DRISCOLL and MORRIS, 2001). The need to sensitize civil servants to coming changes and offer motivational compensations that model their behavior has already been pointed out in empirical studies realized in public organizations as important in favoring implementation (SILVA and MELLO, 2013; FONSECA and MENESES, 2016).

As indicated in Table 3, among the institutional aspects, the dominant category was *external legislation and norms*, followed by *external control mechanisms*, which indicate that most of the external interfering factors in an organization deal with legal impositions and regulatory measures, bearing in mind that there is a normative apparatus which orients the definition and implementation of HRM policies within the context of a company.

**TABLE 3**  
**Frequency of institutional factors by category**

| Factor               | Categories                             | Frequency | Total |
|----------------------|--|-----------|-------|
| <b>Institutional</b> | External legislation and norms         | 10        | 23    |
|                      | External control mechanisms            | 8         |       |
|                      | Institutional relations <sup>(a)</sup> | 5         |       |
|                      | Societal aspects                       | 0         |       |

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

(<sup>a</sup>) New category (*ex post*).

The excerpts of the category *external legislation and norms* especially concern inducing, by legal imposition, the development of new HRM methodologies with the objective of avoiding judicial actions, which points out the need to observe the legality of actions to avoid similar scenarios. In terms of external control mechanisms, recommendations elaborated by control

bodies were cited, which ratifies the need to invest in strategic HRM policies, above all those related to skills, the need for repositioning of personnel, and the creation of indicators to monitor actions in this area. In addition, this emphasizes the need for new SHRM policies so that the organization takes into consideration the disposition of the legal-normative apparatus which governs the subjects at issue.

Once again, as the literature indicates, the identified scenario is characteristic of the public sector, which in seeking to maintain consistency between the policies and practices of HRM in order to achieve governmental objectives, organizes the actions of distinct organizations through broad legislation and possesses in its structure a single central unit to coordinate the other HRM units (BACH, 2010; JÄRVALT and RANDMA-LIIV, 2010). In this sense, the implementation of SHRM in the described case comes up against limitations related to the context of the public sector, which traditionally presents greater regulation than the private sector (FONSECA, CAMÕES and MENESES, 2014; SILVA and MELLO, 2013). This factor restricts the field of action of the HRM unit, which therefore has little autonomy to maneuver around the contingencies that it faces, so that the other difficulties mentioned below in part become tangible due to legal limitations.

However, it should be noted that, in this case, the institutional factors also can exceed positive interference in driving the implementation of SHRM policies, given that the norms and control agents require the execution of some strategic practices and, thus, collaborate so that certain policies can be put into practice, as mentioned in the literature (DECRAMER, SMOLDERS, VANDERSTRAETEN et al., 2012). It should be emphasized, however, that the coercive adoption of SHRM practices may be problematic since it does not consider other intervening contextual factors in the implementation, given that institutional demands by themselves do not guarantee the effectiveness of policies (OHEMENG, 2011).

Among the political aspects, Table 4 shows that the most common categories were: a) the political configuration of the organization; b) the support of upper level administration; and c) administrative discontinuity. These factors are related to the traditional political scenario of the studied company, due to the overlapping technical criteria for politicians in high level posts, which can strongly prejudice the implementation process of HRM and strategic planning as a whole, given that influence and support come to be utilized for purposes other than the achieving of organizational objectives (GUNN and CHEN, 2006).

**TABLE 4**  
**Frequency of political factors by category**

| Factor    | Categories                                  | Frequency | Total |
|-----------|---|-----------|-------|
| Political | Support of the upper level administration   | 14        | 43    |
|           | Political configuration of the organization | 12        |       |
|           | Administrative discontinuity                | 11        |       |
|           | Political ability of HRM leadership         | 3         |       |
|           | Strategic ability of the HRM unit           | 3         |       |

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

In relation to the political configuration of the organization, those interviewed emphasize that the choice of the direction of the organization is exclusively political and the management is set up so that a large portion of the management posts are occupied through party influence, and sometimes the manager does not have the necessary skills to assume the position. According to previous results (FONSECA, 2013), the composition of the management structure based on political motives negatively affects the achievement of organizational objectives, given that the occupants of these managerial positions do not recognize the strategic trajectory (SPILLER and TOMMASSI, 2003).

As a consequence of the large flow of political nominations, there is constant administrative discontinuity, because the emphasis attributed to each strategic objective is strongly dependent on changes in government and parties. Thus, it is emphasized that strategic projects are interrupted, including the actual definition of the organization's strategic planning, which is initiated and discontinued various times. For the same reasons, there is great managerial turnover observed in the organization, which is present at all levels. Perpetual reconstruction and change harm implementation and above all the institutionalization of SHRM policies, given that the priorities and rules of strategic practices are constantly altered (INGRAHAM and RUBAII-BARRETT, 2007). This factor is indicated by Fonseca, Camões and Meneses (2014) as one of the contextual factors of greatest relevance and it is inherent in the Brazilian public sector. Bach (2010) also cites this as an intrinsic factor in public management.

Moreover, the indication of managers for political motivations also harms the adoption of HRM strategic practices, to the extent that nominated managers with this motivation tend to prioritize maintaining their positions, demonstrating a lower level of concern with organizational results (AHENKAN, TENAKWAH and BAWOLE, 2018). Given this attitude of managers, which is partially the result of political influence, the category *support from upper level administration* was highlighted by the interviewees. The excerpts selected in the analysis point out that central decision-making arenas in the company constitute key pieces to the implementation of HRM policies, as the literature argues when it affirms that the involvement of leaders is of great relevance to the strategic actions of the HRM unit (FONSECA, 2013). The support of the upper level administration can be identified based on 3 aspects: a) technical alignment – noted when the leaders possess knowledge of the HRM practices; b) formal involvement – expressed by the formal participation in decisions regarding HRM and in alignment with the unit responsible; and c) informal involvement – noted by the sharing of objectives between the HRM unit and the organization's leadership (BRANDL and POHLER, 2010).

Even though it is essential, currently in the organization under observation we can observe the involvement of the upper level of administration only in short-term agendas. However, according to the interviews and the documents examined, it may be noted that the last few presidencies have demonstrated greater interest in dedicating themselves to strengthening HRM actions relevant to the organization, such as meeting personnel, training and performance evaluation needs. This greater engagement has affected organizational changes promoted through the improvement of HRM policies as advocated by Egginton (2010), in emphasizing the relevance of the role of leaders in positions of authority in influencing change.

In terms of the organizational aspects in accordance with Table 5, these were noted with greater frequency than the other categories, and encompass aspects such as the reaction of the functional corps to changes and the flexibility of organizational culture.

**TABLE 5**  
**Frequency of organizational factors by category**

| Factors        | Categories                                | Frequency | Total |
|----------------|---|-----------|-------|
| Organizational | Cultural aspects                          | 65        | 151   |
|                | Organizational resources                  | 35        |       |
|                | Engagement of managers and civil servants | 21        |       |
|                | Organizational structure                  | 9         |       |
|                | Internal norms                            | 9         |       |
|                | Organizational strategic planning         | 7         |       |
|                | Institutional communication               | 5         |       |

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

First of all, the cultural aspects have to do with the resistance of employees to change. According to the interviewees, in addition to the possibility that practically all of the areas offer resistance to changes due to the implementation of HRM projects, the older civil servants require special attention to the extent that they are more averse to change and less adept in training initiatives. This is a typical characteristic of Brazilian public organizations (BERGUE, 2014), which has already been related in previous theoretical-empirical studies as an obstacle to the implementation of performance management systems (MARQUES, BORGES, MORAIS et al., 2014) and skills management (FONSECA and MENESES, 2016).

To implement new methodologies, a portion of the interviewees pointed out that it is necessary to plan a change management process, in order to make the functional corps more flexible. In this sense, they believe that the upper level of leadership should request this process, which in turn should envision initiatives that value and recognize employees. In addition to the support of the upper level of administration (CÔRTEZ and MENESES, 2017), the literature also points to the central role that can be played by the HRM unit in terms of conducting the change process (GUEST, 1987; ULRICH, 1998), especially in the cultural influence to be used in the HRM practices which promote the dissemination of new values, oriented by results management.

Besides cultural aspects, organizational resources also stand out in the analysis of the components of the organizational factor. The aspect most cited as a point of attention was the lack of financial resources for the training and promotion of employees. In relation to the functional corps of the company, the interviewees mentioned: a) a lack of preparation on the part of the managerial corps; b) an elevated number of employees with primary and secondary schooling; c) the lack of qualification of the current employees, whose education is not aligned with the activities currently performed by the enterprise; d) the aging of the functional corps; and e) the high number of appointed employees. In addition, difficulties were pointed out in relation to the technological resources that the company has, considered inadequate by the participants. It should be noted, that the lack of resources related, results in a decrease in the quality of HRM practices which are essential in favoring the organizational changes needed to implement SHRM. The insufficiency of resources mitigates culture management initiatives, such

as employee training, whose relevance has already been pointed out by the literature (MOURA and SOUZA, 2016).

Finally, there were various excerpts that address the lack of engagement of managers and civil servants in HRM policies, a situation which is attributed to a lack of clarity on the part of the functional corps in relation to company HRM sector initiatives, a lack of understanding that the effectiveness of HRM practices depends on the collaboration of all the company's employees, and the lack of motivation of employees which approaches resistance. This aspect is even more important in performance evaluation, a practice not recognized as effective by the company employees. In light of this, in addition to the technical aspects in relation to the implementation of SHRM policies, actions that promote the sensibilization and involvement of the entire functional corps are crucial at the time of the formulation and implementation of SHRM policies (JONES, JIMMIESON and GRIFFITHS, 2005; SILVA and MELLO, 2013; FONSECA and MENESES, 2016). It should be noted that to obtain greater engagement, it is necessary to investigate empirically with greater depth the motives that lead to this employee behavior, given that the low level of adhesion to SHRM practices harms the effectiveness of its implementation, even though this may occur due to other contingencies.

Finally, among other sectoral factors, in accordance with Table 6, we can see that the category *reputation of the HRM unit* was the most observed during the interviews and the documental research. In general, it may be noted that the company's civil servants' evaluation of the HRM unit is negative, even though they recognize that this sector has been seeking to improve to make their work more and more satisfying. Next, the scarcity of resources was identified as a sectoral aspect that could affect the development and implementation of HRM methodologies.

**TABLE 6**  
**Frequency of sectoral factors by category**

| Factors         | Categories                                | Frequency | Total |
|-----------------|---|-----------|-------|
| <b>Sectoral</b> | Reputation of the HRM Unit                | 50        | 82    |
|                 | Resources of the HRM Unit                 | 14        |       |
|                 | Implementation methodology                | 6         |       |
|                 | Strategic integration of the HRM Unit     | 5         |       |
|                 | Autonomy of the HRM Unit                  | 3         |       |
|                 | Structure of the HRM Unit                 | 2         |       |
|                 | Coexistence of HRM unit's functional role | 2         |       |

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Due to the importance attributed to the area, we have identified that there are great expectations in terms of its practices, even though a good portion of employees have not perceived adequate results, such as the scarce offering of training, which is a frequently mentioned aspect. There are also critiques related to the high number of judicial actions, which according to the interviewees, reflects the poor quality of the actions of the HRM sector – poor reputation – and it is also recognized for: a) excessive bureaucracy; b) a lack of interaction with other areas of the

organization in the defining of its policies; c) a lack of communication and dissemination of its practices; and d) resistance to accepting improvements proposed by other actors. The results converge with what has occurred historically in the public sector in relation to the HRM unit, which has a poor reputation in the view of the functional corps, with little credibility and thus little influence within the organization (LEGGÉ, 1995; TRUSS, 2008).

Also in this sense, from the point of view of the functional corps, the practices of HRM horizontal alignment and integration, one of the main principles of SHRM, which has been broadly addressed by the literature (WRIGHT and SNELL, 1991; M. L. LENGNICK-HALL, C. A. LENGNICK-HALL, ANDRADE et al., 2009), and seeks actions which are configured more as strategies rather than isolated practices of HRA. This is an idea which is also reinforced in the *strategic integration of the HRM unit*, which points out the need for a systemic view of unit practices in order to avoid conflicts between distinct subsystems. Moreover, to improve the unit's credibility, it is argued that its structure and management need to be modernized, as well as the training of the technical corps. It should be noted, however, that to fulfill these premises, an effort needs to be made that transcends the scope of sectoral action, because the effectiveness of vertical (strategic) and horizontal (between various HRM subsystems) integration assumes a favorable organizational dynamic (GUEST, 1987; WRIGHT and MCMAHAN, 1992). Improvements in the image of the unit which is to meet the expectations manifested by the functional corps depend, therefore, on broad interventions sponsored by the upper level of administration, which lead to repercussions in structural and cultural aspects (BERGUE, 2014; CÔRTEZ and MENESES, 2019). The interviewees perceived some initiatives which have improved the sector, namely those which contemplate renovation of the company's direction and the establishment of partnerships with the University of Brasília (UnB) for the development and implementation of new HRM methodologies, but allege, above all, that they are more anxious to see effective results than movements of change.

Thus, we find that the functional corps does not recognize the results of the actions promoted by the HRM unit, especially those related to performance management. This affects the adhesion of organization managers and civil servants to policy, because they do not believe in its effectiveness. This context results in the weakening of the unit's reputation, creating a vicious cycle (KIM and HOLZER, 2016). Regarding this point, it should be emphasized that the possible causes of this conjuncture exceed the form of the conception of the performance management policy and the way in which the results obtained are communicated and utilized by the other members of the organization. Even though the reputation of the HRM unit is affected by this conjuncture, strategic HRM policies, such as performance management, in order to be successful, require the coordination of the efforts of organizational actors on different levels and scopes of action, external to the HRM unit (JACKSON, SCHULER and JIANG, 2014). Again, we see the close relationship between the distinct challenges cited, which emphasizes the complexity of the organizational context that the HRM unit faces in instituting new HRM policies.

In addition, we should note the category relative to the resources of the HRM unit. The lack of financial resources for promoting the training of company employees was mentioned again, and this time for the company as a whole, rather than just the HRM area. It was also pointed out that the unit does not have the tools, software and technological resources necessary to follow the company's growth, given that the relationship between SHRM and information technology



constitutes a point that is relevant to its implementation (AHENKAN, TENAKWAH and BAWOLE, 2018). In relation to the employees allocated to the area, the importance of updating their skills and promoting renovation in management was mentioned as well as the inexistence of a knowledge management policy in the area, which is associated with high turnover and affects the quality of the activities developed by the sector. Contrary to these critiques, the interviewees understand that part of the responsibility for the provision of the necessary resources and the achievements of the programs and actions of the HRM unit is that of the organization itself, which does not give the unit the means to always improve itself.

Given this, it is verified that the contingencies of a sectoral nature are broadly related to one another, given that a structure is not provided for the unit to adopt strategic actions, turning it into a sector limited by norms that, therefore, involve purely bureaucratic actions. In this scenario, Wright and Snell (1991) point to the need to make the limits of HRM unit actions flexible in the public sector so that we may perceive: a) an effective cultural change in the field; and b) the concession of greater autonomy to the unit, which, even though it was rarely cited as an interfering factor in the implementation of SHRM, figures as a central element to the extent that it increases the decision making power of the HRM sector, which will make it internally viable to adapt strategic models and increase the value of the sector (FONSECA, 2003; TRUSS, 2008).

In sum, from a sectoral perspective, the impressions from the interviews indicate that the unit does not have a favorable reputation in terms of the development and implementation of SHRM policies. This finding ratifies the importance of actively involving the upper level of leadership, the functional corps and other units to ensure successful development and the implementation of new projects and methodologies, treating SHRM actions as the responsibility of all of the company managers and not just the human resources sector, guaranteeing the application of principles of vertical and horizontal alignment to HRM practices.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

SHRM policies should be aligned with the environmental and organizational context to favor the successful implementation of new technologies. Given this, we have researched institutional, political, organizational and sectoral aspects that interfere with the progress of these projects, and they should be considered during the development and implementation of the methodologies in question.

In this sense, some of the interfering factors stand out, especially those which belong to the organizational factors. The analysis demonstrates that the greatest barrier to be faced in the opinion of the interviewees is of a cultural nature, since the employees of the examined organization are resistant to change and are not used to engaging in the HRM policies and practices of the company. The results obtained in this study suggest that overcoming these obstacles can be achieved by including the functional corps in the development of the methodologies used, and the HRM actions should include the entire company to interject values related to cooperation and mitigate resistance.

We conclude, further, based on our results that there is a perception on the part of the functional corps that the implementation of SHRM policies is not successful, which is the

responsibility of the HRM, even though the complexity of the contingencies identified have demonstrated that the challenges extend well beyond the field of action of this sector. In this sense, the lack of resources made available to the area in human, financial and technological terms is associated with the poor reputation of the HRM unit, and this indicates that successful SHRM policies need to be associated with the active participation of not only the personnel sector, but also other units and employees.

First, the successful implementation of SHRM policies depends on the recognition of its strategic value by members of the upper level of management, the management corps and all the employees of the company. More than an intervention of a technical nature in the company's dynamic, these initiatives should be treated as a process of organizational change, designed to favor the internalization of values typically noted in organizations oriented towards learning and results. This observation is a challenge, especially in the public sector with its voluminous normative restrictions and political influences, and organizational changes over time require necessary preparation and sensibilization. Management changes on a large scale within the context of the Executive Branch were promoted in the 1990s (PEREIRA, 2006) and in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (CAMÕES and MENESES, 2016), without success. However, there are studies that make it possible to suppose that the realization of occasional interventions, set in specific organizations, and initiated internally have greater chances of success, as long as HRM units have the autonomy to accomplish this (DRISCOLL and MORRIS, 2001; TRUSS, 2009).

Our findings are in accordance with the academic and professional understanding of the factors which exercise an influence on the effectiveness of the implementation of HRM policies and practices, especially those which extend beyond problems of a technical nature, constituting contingencies of a contextual, structural and cultural nature. In this sense, we propose a model to diagnose the internal and external environment of an organization which contributes with the proper formulation and implementation of SHRM policies in public organizations. However, it is relevant to emphasize that this study examines a single public company in depth, and even though it presents conclusions which may apply to the entire sector, it is not possible to generalize based on this sample.

Thus, we suggest deeper studies of the distinct interfering factors identified as relevant to the implementation of SHRM, especially in relation to the relationships between them. Another proposal is to investigate the initiatives developed by this organization or by other public organizations in order to circumvent the interfering factors cited as difficulties or challenges to the effective implementation of strategic HRM policies and practices.

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