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CHAPTER 2

The Interfaces between People Management, Culture, and Networks in Agricultural Systems

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INTRODUCTION

The agribusiness sector plays a fundamental role in the Brazilian economy, contributing to job creation and exports, accounting for a quarter of the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP). However, the interface between agribusiness and People Management (PM) practices presents significant challenges that need to be overcome to achieve sustainable development. The shortage of qualified labor, working conditions in the field, and the seasonality of activities are some of the issues that require attention.

In the dynamic scenario of Brazilian agribusiness, the analysis of PM practices reveals a crucial intersection with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) established by the United Nations. PM in agricultural companies is not limited to operational issues but encompasses a broader spectrum that includes social, economic, and environmental responsibility.

Regarding the promotion of safe and healthy working conditions for rural workers, investment in training to increase efficiency and the adoption of inclusive practices contribute directly to SDG 8, which addresses “Decent Work and Economic Growth.”

The analysis of PM practices cannot overlook the study of networks, as organizations are influenced by their environment. This degree of influence is an essential element in understanding the dynamics of organizations in various sectors. Management styles are deeply influenced by cultural factors, whether organizational or local. Culture also influences the behavior of work teams and the decisions made by these organizations. It is necessary to understand how values, beliefs, and norms reflect PM practices and how they can promote a healthy and productive work environment.

The theory of social networks, as developed by Granovetter (2007), suggests that the ties established in networks can play a crucial role in disseminating information and forming professional connections. In the agribusiness sector, where collaboration and knowledge exchange are vital,

it is essential to understand how social networks can facilitate or hinder PM practices. These networks can create informal communication channels, accelerate the diffusion of best practices, and even impact innovation in the sector.

Therefore, this chapter aims to analyze PM practices in the context of Brazilian agribusiness, considering the challenges and opportunities considering the Sustainable Development Goals, specifically SDG 8, as it relates to generating decent employment, innovation in an interrelation with culture, and the dynamics of social networks, providing insights for agribusiness organizations.

INTERFACES BETWEEN CULTURE, NETWORKS, AND PEOPLE MANAGEMENT

According to Bohlander and Snell (2015), it is possible to observe that PM has assumed a strategic role, surpassing the traditional support function and constituting an essential organizational competence since people are the main protagonists in achieving results, given their potential in producing knowledge and innovation.

It is important to highlight that, according to Pedraza-Rodriguez *et al.* (2023), different cultural elements have a positive effect on the outcome of innovation. This result suggests active efforts by managers to develop a culture of innovation based on best practices rather than traditional ones. Obviously, companies need new technological capabilities to achieve competitive advantages, but they also require the adoption of belief systems, norms, and rules to consider innovation as a key asset.

In summary, PM should not only have a traditional role but also expand and constitute the essential competencies to achieve organizational and individual objectives; people are valuable and constitute a source of competitive advantage. PM policies and practices need to contribute to greater well-being, allowing greater personal and professional fulfillment. These actions reduce turnover and generate higher job satisfaction rates,

highlighting how to stimulate shared values and retain employees (Fiusa, 2008; Pham, 2023).

The relevance and recognition of informal interactions within organizations have gained increasing importance. As a result, studies have emerged that address the intersections between social networks and organizations (Lazzarini, 2008). According to Granovetter (2007), social activities are fundamental in configuring economic actions.

The theory of social networks emerges with the objective of establishing an intermediate approach in characterizing the structures of social interactions in economic activity. According to social network theory, individuals do not act or make decisions in isolation, like independent atoms; instead, their actions are deeply embedded in complex and continuous systems of social relations (Granovetter, 2007).

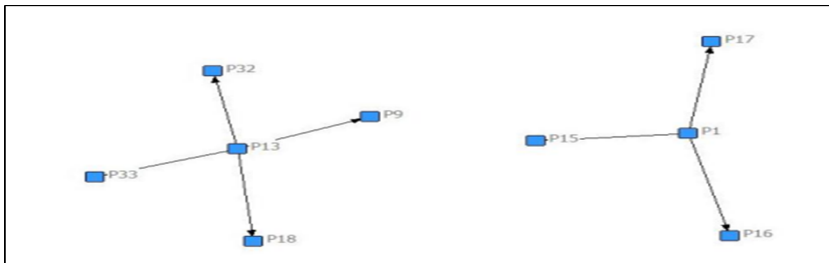
Marteletto (2001) highlights social networks as composed of sets of autonomous participants who share ideas and resources based on the same values, becoming systems of nodes and links from a structure without geographical boundaries.

The information presented here is some of the results of research conducted with the Postgraduate Program in Agribusiness and Development (2017). This research highlighted the importance of forms of relationship and information exchange between peanut farmers and agrarian agents to map information networks on production and PM practices (Yamauchi, 2017).

The data obtained for configuring the social network of information exchanges (Figure 1) on production demonstrated the presence of a network composed of sub-networks, where the connection of these sub-networks is made by key agents, the main ones being input suppliers and the producers themselves (P1, P2, P4, P6, and P13). Thus, it is possible to identify in the information networks the elements that can drive the adoption of new PM practices as being input suppliers due to the centrality occupied in the network and the main producers (P1, P2, P4, P6, and P13).

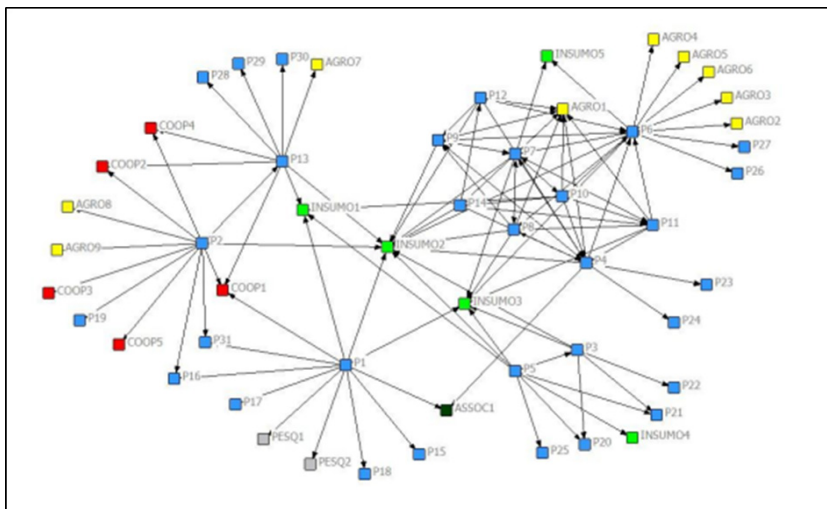
The second network identified (Figure 2) presents relationships in information exchanges regarding PM practices, revealing that these relationships are scarce and demonstrate fragility in the exchange of information on this topic, especially when compared to the network of information exchange on production. These analyses demonstrated that production and productivity circumstances occupy a more important role for producers than issues related to PM practices, even for those who export, P4, for example, does not even appear as an actor in this network. The analysis of the PM network revealed the insufficiency previously shown when asked the producers what structures and models were used.

Figure 1 – Information network between producers and support agents



Source: Yamauchi (2017).

Figure 2 – Information network on people management



Source: Yamauchi (2017).

This observation leads to the conclusion that producers who have more central roles in the network are the same ones who exchange information about HR practices. In this sense, although there are laws regarding rural workers that directly or indirectly influence their practices, the exchange of production information is still higher than those focused on HR.

From this perspective, production and productivity are at a higher level of attention, even among producers who interact with the external market. Here, special attention is given to the obtained data, as no HR strategies directed toward future demands that could be incorporated into certifications for participation in the international market were identified. For example, in environmental aspects, there is pressure for companies to develop sufficient initiatives to reduce obstacles and increase exports (Onjewu *et al.*, 2023).

According to Kremer and Talamini (2018), based on the characterization of the production chain and the responses obtained from the questionnaires (Figure 3), it was possible to identify the networks of

personal relationships present in transactions between the different links of this chain. It was found that social relationships among individuals of a certain link, such as producers, proved to be more solid, driven by the organization in cooperatives that promote the exchange of experiences and information among members. This highlights the importance of cooperation in this context, where the formation of social ties can contribute to the sharing of knowledge and competitive advantages.

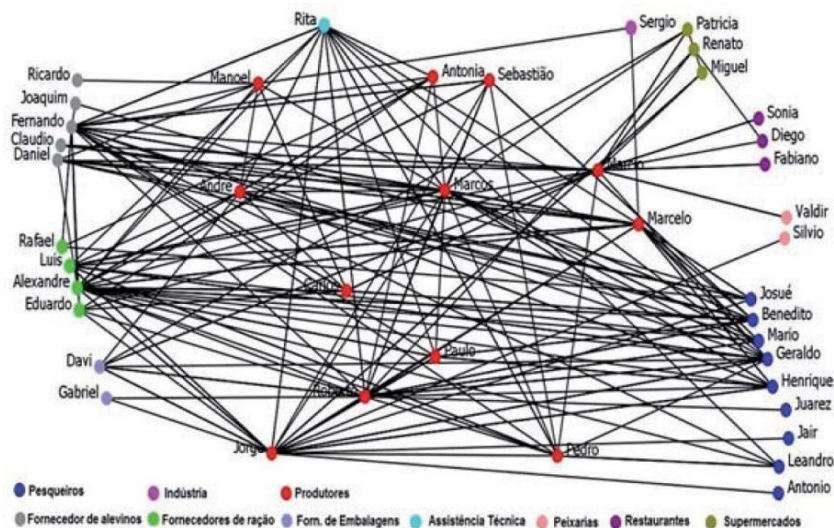
However, it is noted that the same pattern of central actors is observed in the presentation of the previous case with peanut producers, where some occupy this central role as well as the support of cooperatives as important actors for disseminating and increasing information.

In links associated with supply and commercialization, social relationships seem to be less prominent. However, it is relevant to note that friendship and kinship relations also play a role in creating these networks of social relations, especially among producers, where there are family ties that directly influence social connections (Kremer; Talamini, 2018).

According to Kremer and Talamini (2018), the results of this study can be widely applied in the management of the fish production chain. In the agribusiness context, where the exchange of experiences among producers plays a crucial role, social relationship networks become fertile ground for obtaining competitive advantages and sharing knowledge. Identifying the central individuals in the network, who have access to information and act as intermediaries among agents, can facilitate the process of knowledge dissemination and the use of these individuals as facilitators in information transmission.

It is important to note that identifying central agents within a social network can support the implementation of public policies and development programs in the analyzed chain. For instance, as shown in studies on the peanut and fish markets, these agents have the potential to positively influence others by serving as references, thereby facilitating the acceptance and engagement of all network participants. Effective information management, therefore, contributes to sustainable development (Kremer; Talamini, 2018; Yamauchi, 2017).

Figure 3 – Social Netchain of the fish supply chain in Mundo Novo



Source: Kremer and Talamini (2018).

Given that central agents exert greater influence compared to other actors, it is crucial to emphasize their impact on promoting and disseminating information related to the PM theme, as well as the importance of trust and commitment as essential elements in forming a solid structure and effective governance. Relationships based on trust and commitment help establish a more balanced network capable of addressing asymmetries and potential conflicts synergistically, with clearly defined roles and rules that the group establishes and accepts (Bertóli; Giglio; Rimoli, 2015).

Certain categories highlight key factors (Box 1) when considering the organization of social networks as a strategy to promote and disseminate information and PM practices in agribusiness.

Box 1 – Organizing categories of networks and some indicators of their presence

Categories	Dominant Concept	Content to be Observed	Some Indicators
Commitment	Making oneself available for collective actions.	Attitudes and actions to achieve collective objectives, or help another actor, even without personal gain.	1. Regularly participating in meetings and decisions. 2. Helping others, even without personal benefit. 3. Taking responsibility for joint actions. 4. Fulfilling agreements and ensuring others do as well. 5. Existence of promises for continued relations among partners.
Trust	Placing oneself in dependency on another.	Attitudes and actions where the individual exposes themselves to the collective or depends on another without resorting to formal control mechanisms.	1. Sharing a problem or weakness of their business with others. 2. Taking on a responsibility whose execution depends on another. 3. Making their resources, of any kind, available for others to use, without needing safeguards. 4. Signs that an actor believes in and follows the established informal rules and goals of the network. 5. Signs that an actor trusts the integrity of people in the network.
Structure Configuration	More defined roles and positions of actors in the network.	The repetition, frequency, and content of relationships between actors, in both directions (receiving and sending), indicate the positions of actors in the network and the network's relational structure. The convergence of responses about roles indicates clarity of actions and each one's position.	1. Knowledge about how many actors participate in the network. 2. Position of some actors based on the number of cited relationships. 3. Signs of dominance of the content of ties (more commercial, more social, more political, more institutional).

Governance	Set (or system) of rules for incentives, resource protection, and behavior control.	Any explicit or implicit rule that imposes behavior restrictions, protects resources (collective or individual) and encourages collective actions.	1. Rules about admission and exclusion of actors from the core group. 2. Rules about penalties. 3. Control by authority or reputation (e.g., a more powerful actor) or knowledge dominance. 4. Social controls (e.g., the existence of blogs, community sites, and others with information about participants).
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Source: Bertóli, Giglio and Rimoli (2015).

The analysis of social networks shows a significant interconnection between the categories of commitment, trust, structure configuration, and governance in the agribusiness context. Commitment, highlighted as the willingness to engage in collective actions, is essentially linked to trust, where actors depend on each other. Commitment is manifested in actions such as regularly participating in meetings, taking on joint responsibilities, and fulfilling agreements, while trust is evident when actors expose themselves to the collective and trust the integrity of other participants (Bertóli; Giglio; Rimoli, 2015).

Based on these assumptions, social network analysis becomes a valuable tool for understanding the intrinsic dynamics of agribusiness and how HR practices can be disseminated. Through this analysis, it is possible to identify central actors who play influential roles in the network, understand how commitment and trust affect collaboration, analyze the structure of relationships, and the rules that govern them. With this information, HR can be more effectively directed, promoting cooperation, knowledge transmission, and sustainable development in the agribusiness sector.

Similarly, organizational culture, as initially discussed, is also interconnected with social network analysis, as the culture of an organization profoundly influences how HR policies are perceived and adopted by employees and organizations in agribusiness. Understanding this interaction is crucial for implementing and enhancing HR practices.

Likewise, the SDGs, notably SDG 8, mentioned earlier, are also related to these issues, as the dissemination of aligned HR practices is fundamental to promoting a more sustainable approach in agribusiness. Therefore, social networks play a vital role in raising awareness and collaboration around these goals, connecting professionals and organizations that seek to contribute to more sustainable development.

Based on these principles, the proposed research in this chapter aimed to present how these elements connect and how they can be optimized to achieve more effective HR practices in Brazilian agribusiness. Social network analysis and organizational culture are key pieces of this puzzle, contributing to promoting a more sustainable, collaborative, and efficient sector.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This chapter explored the complex interaction between HR management, organizational culture, social networks, and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 8) in the context of Brazilian agribusiness, specifically considering different agrarian systems.

Agribusiness plays a crucial role in Brazil's economy, however, it faces significant challenges related to HR management, such as the scarcity of qualified labor and working conditions in the field. In this dynamic scenario, HR practices are not limited to operational issues but encompass social, economic, and environmental responsibility.

The network analysis revealed that social relationships play a vital role in shaping economic actions and can be a fertile ground for sharing knowledge and competitive advantages. Identifying central actors in the network who are committed and trustworthy can facilitate information dissemination and use these individuals as facilitators in knowledge transmission.

Organizational culture plays an essential role in how HR practices are perceived and adopted by organizations and employees. Understanding this interaction is necessary for programming more effective HR policies.

Finally, aligning HR practices with the SDGs, specifically SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth – can contribute to promoting sustainable development in agribusiness, and social networks are vital in raising awareness of these goals, connecting professionals and organizations with more collaborative and sustainable HR practices.

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