The Human Resources Management Contribution to Social Responsibility and Environmental Sustainability: Explorations from Ibero-America

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Abstract

In this paper we aim to advance the discussion on Human Resources Management's quest to create value around social responsibility and environmental sustainability. We explore the perceptions reported by Human Resource managers in three Ibero-American countries (Spain, the Dominican Republic and Costa Rica). We focus on the hospitality sector, one of particular relevancy for these countries and with significant sustainability challenges. Relying on in-depth interviews in twenty-eight organizations and a mixed-methods approach, we examine HR managers' underlying notions around social and environmental issues, stakeholder collaboration, HRM practices, roles and internal organization. Analysis of the interviews suggests varying views on those dimensions, as well as identifies Active and Advanced firms, the latter showing more commitment to sustainability (as part of the organizational culture), usage of HRM practices and engagement with multiple stakeholders. From this empirical exploration and relying on current sustainability developments, we contribute to the literature by outlining an externally-oriented model (centred on corporate priorities, communities' flourishing and ecosystems' resilience) aiming to advance HRM's engagement with sustainability-driven agendas.

Key Words: HRM, social responsibility, environmental sustainability, value creation

Introduction

The last ten years have seen an intense scholarly debate around the contribution that Human Resources Management (HRM) is making or should make towards social responsibility and environmental sustainability (SR/ES) (e.g. Cohen, 2010; Cohen, Taylor & Muller-Camen, 2012; SHRM, 2011; Ehnert, Parsa, Roper, Wagner & Muller-Camen, 2016; Haddock-Millar, Sanyal & Muller-Camen, 2016). This work has come under multiple headings, e.g. "responsible human resources" (Shen & Jiuhua, 2011), "responsible international human resources management" (Shen, 2011), "sustainable human resources" (Kramar, 2014), "green HRM" (Renwick, Jabbour, Muller-Camen, Redman & Wilkinson, 2016), etc.

Empirically, a variety of HRM domains have been examined – showing *mixed* results. Some authors have reported what they perceive as *disappointing results*, e.g. after finding not so pro-active or productive roles by HRM professionals in the sustainability agendas of their organizations (Guerci and Pedrini, 2014; Harris & Tregidga, 2012; Parkes & Davis, 2013; Zibarras & Coan, 2015; Wagner, 2011). Other scholars have reported what perhaps can be seen as more *positive* findings (Collier & Esteban, 2007; Delmas & Pekovic, 2013; Ehnert et al., 2016; Merriman & Sen, 2012).

Nevertheless, this is a field growing in maturity, as evidenced by multiple *integrative* models aiming to offer theoretical and practical insights. Trying to capture and 'organize' this abundance of work, several literature reviews bring conceptual clarity and outline multiple promising avenues for research (e.g. Jackson, Renwick, Jabbour & Muller-Camen, 2011; Renwick, Redman & McGuire, 2013; Renwick et al., 2016). Among those literature reviews, Kramar (2014) adopts the increasingly common term 'sustainable human resource management' to describe this field of study, and claims that the body of literature can be divided into three categories.

Within the category of 'capability reproduction' we find studies that have focused on linking HRM and sustainability practices with internal outcomes, such as economic ones or employee betterment conditions (e.g. satisfaction, engagement, etc). A second group of studies, which can be referred to as 'promoting social and environmental health', has an externally-oriented focus and has explored the linkage between HRM practices and SR/ES outcomes. A third, perhaps more ambitious, group can be named 'connections', in which HRM aims to support "triple bottom line" approaches (Elkington, 1994) around *joint* economic, social and environmental results.

This paper positions itself in the second body of literature, with an *external* focus, identified by Kramar (2014) as 'promoting social and environmental health', and it aligns itself with Banerjee's (2011) concerns to move from input-driven to *outputfocused* sustainability agendas. Our research aim is, therefore, twofold. First, it seeks to explore empirically HRM's engagement with SR/ES in a multi-country context that has received little scholarly attention. Second, it aims to contribute to the existing efforts to adapt or develop *integrative* models that help *both* the social *and* environmental contributions of HRM. For this purpose we adopt and later develop Ulrich and Brockbank's (2005) HR Value Proposition model, embracing its outside/in focus and introducing two additional components: *communities* and *ecosystems*.

This model can be seen as an 'HRM architecture', inviting HRM professionals to understand key social and environmental issues related to the business context, to mobilize multiple (internal and external) stakeholders, to prioritize the HRM practices that can deliver the highest impact, and to adapt accordingly the internal role and organization of HRM. These tenets guided our empirical exploration and research questions: How do HR managers conceive SR/ES? How do they link

these to the business challenges? What are the firm's social and environmental initiatives? How do they foster collaboration with other stakeholders? Which HRM practices around "sustainability" do they see as most useful? What roles do they adopt and what internal organization do they put in place? Our research relies on qualitative, in-depth interviews whose analysis was carried out using a mixed-methods approach. Interviews took place in three Ibero-American countries: Spain, the Dominican Republic and Costa Rica. The Ibero-American states (the Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking nations of America and Europe) show significant commonalities in their socio-cultural and macroeconomic contexts, fostered through constant political and business collaboration (Gracia, 2013; Vassolo, De Castro & Gomez-Mejia, 2011), plus growing research ties, as evidenced by the journal and activities of the Iberoamerican Academy of Management (an affiliate of the Academy of Management), in which HRM scholars are particularly active. Research in the field of SR/ES and HRM is very limited in this growing region, and our work aims to address this gap.

We focused on the travel and tourism industry (hospitality sector), of particular relevance for these three countries, for which it represents a significant percentage of the GDP, national employment etc. (Table 1 shows some key indicators).

[Table 1 near here]

At the same time this is an industry with tremendous SR/ES challenges, which force corporate and HR leaders to pay particular attention to both the social and environmental contexts in which businesses operate, particularly if they are to foster responsible practices (Mowforth, Charlton, & Munt, 2008).

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This paper is organized as follows: we first briefly outline the literature on (key) integrative frameworks that have been crafted around HRM and SR/ES. We then present our slightly adapted model of Ulrich and Brockbank (2005). We then describe our data collection and analytical methods. After that, we present our findings and discuss them in the light of existing literature. This allows us to both present an externally-oriented model (centred on corporate priorities, communities' flourishing and ecosystems' resilience) and to extract implications.

Integrative frameworks in HRM's agenda around social responsibility and environmental sustainability

There are now multiple *integrative* models centred on HRM and SR/ES, plus other recent HRM strategy models that consider SR/ES as a key dimension (e.g. DuBois & DuBois, 2012; Ehnert, 2009; Fairfield Harmon & Behson, 2011; Guerci Longoni, & Luzzini, 2016; Jabbour and Santos; 2008a; Jabbour & Jabbour, 2016; Jackson et al., 2014).

A succinct examination of these integrative models reveals a growing concern to move beyond the identification of a few impactful HRM practices to a more holistic consideration of such drivers as a whole, as a body of aligned practices. At the same time, the focus seems to have shifted from an (essentially) internal one, often emphasizing concerns around compliance (e.g. Shen, 2011), to one that aims to deal with *both* the internal and external *business* context of the firm (DuBois & DuBois, 2012). There is a growing interest in understanding (and engaging with) internal and external stakeholders (Guerci et al., 2016). Calls to increase efforts around measurement (Cohen, 2010), the crucial importance of leadership's commitment (SHRM, 2011), and the relevancy of *organizational culture* and *organizational learning* (Haugh & Talwar, 2010; Jabbour & Jabbour, 2016), appear

as recurrent themes. Furthermore, this literature seems to embrace many of the tenets found in *strategic HRM* and the quest to foster *competitive advantage* through SR/ES (Alcaraz, Hollander, & Navarra, in press).

However, there has been little engagement with influential frameworks, such as Porter and Kramer's (2011) concept of *shared value creation*, and its usefulness to help organizations *focus on* and identify the social and environmental issues closely aligned with the core business of the firm.

In recent years, underlying notions of 'sustainability' or 'sustainable development' in these integrative models seem to have gained refinement and depth (e.g. DuBois & DuBois, 2012). Some of these efforts have come with a call for HRM managers to understand key notions about 'green competence' (Subramanian, Abdulrahman, Wu & Nath, 2016), although the field (as with many other disciplines within management) seems to be disconnected from important sustainability developments from the natural sciences, such as the work on social-ecological systems and *ecosystems' resilience* (Whiteman, Walker & Perego, 2013), and from more critical approaches to growth and '*flourishing*' within ecological limits (Jackson, 2009). What this work from the natural sciences has in common is that it highlights not merely the *biophysical* dependencies of organizations, but also the many *services* (provisioning, ecologically-regulating, supporting, and cultural) offered by ecosystems (Walker, Holling, Carpenter, & Kinzig, 2004). These developments also emphasize the need to understand different (place and time) scales, and the need to allow multiple stakeholders to benefit from those services - *participating* meaningfully and creatively in the life of organizations in less ecologically-demanding ways (Jackson, 2011).

Although the above-mentioned HRM integrative models should certainly be welcomed, it is our view that sometimes their complexity may hamper theory

translation into action and change. In addition, many of these models tend to focus on the social *or* environmental agendas (not both). A modified or expanded version of Ulrich and Brockbank's (2005) HR Value Proposition integrative model is one that, in our view, can add to those efforts and help advance HRM's SR/ES involvement.

The quest for an HR Value Proposition that advances the social and environmental agenda

The HR Value Proposition (Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005) has a strategic orientation, and is organized around five key factors. It assumes that HRM can only deliver value to organizations by (factor one) understanding deeply the *external business realities*, i.e. the forces (e.g. regulatory, technological and economic) affecting the firm, and connecting those to the day-to-day work. In this outside/in approach, HR professionals (factor two) need to broad the spectrum of *stakeholders* with whom to interact in order to deliver clear outcomes in areas that those stakeholders value the most (e.g. reputation for investors, customer connectivity for the *key* customers of the firm etc.). To this end, HRM professionals need to carefully select (factor three) from their broad *'menu' of practices*, which for the purpose of synthesis may be organized into four categories: *people* (staffing, training, development), *performance* (setting standards, allocating rewards, providing feedback), *information* (outside-in and inside-out oriented) and *workflow* (who does the work, and how and where the work is done). A value-creation agenda, therefore, requires (factor four) resources for the *HRM organization and strategy,* and (factor five) *HRM professionalism* (such as roles, competences and development), to be orchestrated smoothly.

Although neither the original model nor subsequent "developments" are particularly centred on SR/ES (which is mentioned only in passing), that work - in its elegance,

scope and simplicity - contains what we see as powerful conceptual guidance to help HRM cope with SR/ES agendas and to continue translating ideas into action and change (Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005). In our research we dealt with all five factors in the HR Value Proposition, but condensed factors four and five into one that we named '*HRM organization and roles'* as, in our view, this offers a simpler and more intuitive conception. Our approach acknowledges the crucial issues that exist concerning SR/ES and internal staff - and the mutually reinforcing feedback that sustainability agendas may bring, as is now well documented in the literature (Collier & Esteban, 2007).

However, as mentioned previously, in this research, we explicitly adopted an *external* focus – exploring the managers' accounts concerning the mobilization of both internal and external stakeholders, including employees, to provide external outcomes. We present our empirical method next.

Empirical and Analytical Approach

Data Collection

Our empirical data was obtained from qualitative, semi-structured, in-depth interviews in twenty eight hospitality firms in three countries (Spain, the Dominican Republic and Cost a Rica). Firms were selected for their commitment to SR/ES, as evidenced by their annual reports, FTSE Index membership, local press articles and awards, certifications (e.g. Green Globe, Earth Check, etc), and activity in sustainability networks (e.g. United Nations Global Compact, International Tourism Partnership, etc). (See sample description in Table 2, in which names have been anonymized).

[Table 2 near here]

Ours is a purposeful, *non-probability* sampling logic (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Patton, 2002) and, therefore, does not seek *statistical* representativeness or generalizability. Instead, like other research with qualitative foundations, it seeks an *indepth examination* of a relevant phenomenon.

In each of these firms we held several (face to face) interviews, one with the most senior manager dealing with HR (twenty six interviews in total) and another with the person in charge of SR/ES (when these were not directly the responsibility of the HR staff). A total of *thirty six interviews* were held: thirteen in the Dominican Republic, thirteen in Spain and ten in Costa Rica. Interviews were all conducted by the authors of this paper located in those three countries, during several phases: initially in 2012-2013, and then a second stage in 2014, which allowed us an opportunity for further enquiry and exploration of key issues, as these emerged from the first phase, plus further refinement of our analytical 'lens'.

We obtained the interviewees' written consent to audio-tape the interviews, provided that we maintained anonymity. All interviews lasted between one and two hours, were conducted in Spanish, audio-taped, and transcribed verbatim (the quotes here are translations). The first three authors were involved in random checks to maximize transcript accuracy, and most transcriptions were offered to the interviewees for their "validation". The interview guiding questions were based on our adaptation of Ulrich and Brockbank's mentioned model (see Table 3).

[Table 3 near here]

Data Analysis

Our analysis relies on a *mixed methods* approach (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007) as we performed thematic and content analysis of our interview transcripts in addition to a counting and 'rating' exercise.

We first identified themes through the recognition of regularities, consistency and commonalities (following guidelines such as those offered by Ryan & Bernard, 2003). A template analysis (King, 2004) was used, and three forms were produced in order to code and agglutinate the data into the four key dimensions of our adapted model, to specify the appearances of concrete HRM practices (around people, performance, information and work), and to detect mis/alignments between the HR professional and other interviewees in the organization (if any).

The first three signing authors of this paper read through the transcripts independently and were involved in the analytical exercise. A recursive, iterative, triangulating process (Denzin, 1978) allowed us to share views, refine topics and subcategories, ensure cohesiveness among the analysts, and thereby enhance the validity of inferences or the 'trustworthiness' of the findings. The first author led the key aspects of the process. An example of our coding application is offered in Table 4.

[Table 4 near here]

Inspired by the mixed-methods approach of Gond et al. (2011), we also counted the "appearances" of the main activities reported in each interview (in order to infer percentages of organizations being involved in those activities). We also *rated* firms (on a 5 point scale) in each of the four dimensions of the model, based on the first three authors' assessment of their SR/ES apparent sophistication - a 'weighting' exercise that is common in similar mixed-methods studies (see Molina-Azorín &

Font, 2016; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2010). This resulted in the identification of two broad categories of firms: those who described compelling, rich activities in each of the four dimensions, outlining clear HR links to business, SR/ES issues, were classified as 'Advanced' (seven organizations), while the rest were considered 'Active' (see Table 5).

[Table 5 near here]

Ontologically and epistemologically, our approach relies on *Social-Constructionism*, a perspective that recognizes the social nature of human knowledge and its manifestation in *discourses and narratives* as spoken or written 'texts' that may shape, translate or influence action (Gergen, 2015).

We are obviously aware that crucial socio-cultural, economic, regulatory and other *forces*, among others, must be influencing the firms of our study (e.g. European and national policies on energy in the case of Spain, the National Strategy for Development in the Dominican Republic, or the Costa Rican Sustainability Touristic Certificate), as well as regulative, normative and cognitive elements (Palthe, 2014) within the organizations themselves.

We certainly acknowledge that contextual and comparative factors, plus actions *beyond* the discourse, also need to be the object of examination. However, we focused entirely on the narratives of our participants and did *not* seek to examine *anything beyond the texts of our participants.* Embracing the key tenets of *socialconstructionism*, we examined those additional factors *only* if they "found their way" (Burr, 2003) into the *narratives* of our interviewees. This can be seen as a limitation of our study (more positivistic traditions would see it this way), but from a

socialconstructionist perspective interviewees' accounts are considered as discourse elements revealing perceptions that deserve analytical attention *per se.* The following section presents our main findings.

Findings

Education, health and infrastructure-support were the *social* areas on which most of our HR managers reported focusing their efforts. Internal employees and other stakeholders were mobilized to support the surrounding communities, their schools and hospitals, or their local culture (e.g. local craftwork and arts). Recycling and waste management, together with energy and water savings, were the *environmental* activities more commonly reported. We present our findings next, organizing these around our (slightly modified) HR Value Proposition model (Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005).

Dimension I: Approaches to business and social/environmental issues

As shown in Table 4, we identified three essential approaches taken by the managers we interviewed. In the *philanthropic approach,* SR/ES issues were seen by HR managers as relating to altruistic purposes (employees' volunteering for projects, giving goods etc.), and often were pictured as isolated initiatives. In a second approach, SR/ES were seen as opportunities to *'maximize efficiency',* and HRM was oriented towards supporting employees in the search for economic savings in the firm's operations (e.g. reducing energy and water consumption). In a third, *strategic orientation,* mostly found within the *Advanced* group of firms, HR managers made frequent linkages between external (social and environmental, and less frequently economic) issues and internal HRM practices. They would refer in depth to the (tourism and hospitality) industry challenges, as well as the key SR/ES issues affecting it (such as the increasing trend in which 'guests select certain

hotels to stay at because they are green hotels' (H27). The accounts of the managers in this group often revealed deep concerns regarding the development of nearby communities, elaborated on rising trends, and emphasized the dependence of their businesses on the health of ecosystems, highlighting problems such as 'the increasing coastal erosion and the disappearing coral reefs that have devastating effects on our beaches' (H06).

Dimension II. Collaborating with (internal and external) stakeholders

Our data suggested three main types of interactions between HR managers and several other stakeholders (Figure 1).

[Figure 1 near here]

Materially-based interactions: Hotels offered *economic* support (donations, investments, sponsorships etc.) or tangible *goods* (food, beverages, medicine, etc.).

Some hotels reported acting as mediators, distributing the goods provided (e.g. from customers or the employees themselves) to external social/environmental causes.

Knowledge-based interactions: Participants reported getting involved with several other stakeholders to generate *ideas and solutions*. Some of these interactions relied on inter-department committees, and occasionally these involved competitors in the industry ('each month the committee meets with HR members of different hotels, then we share common and good practices' (H14).

Action-based interactions: Participants reported involving internal stakeholders (e.g. executives and employees) and external ones (e.g. customers, other hotels, foundations, and nearby communities) in multiple externally-oriented programs.

These ranged from discrete, occasional activities pursuing "one-shot" results, such as 'organizing a cleaning day with the community and nearby hotels' (H16), to capacitybuilding efforts (e.g. for targeted populations such as young vulnerable women).

We found a range of engagement with these three types of interactions. At one extreme our participants seemed to interact almost exclusively with employees. At the other extreme they reported interacting with a larger group of stakeholders, involving social or pro-environmental groups, creating new associations, or championing industry forums.

Dimension III. Crafting HRM practices

Here we present our findings regarding what Ulrich and Brockbank (2005) describe as a 'menu' of HRM choices concerned with their *people*, *performance*, *information* and *workflow* dimensions.

People

Induction. Less than thirty per cent of our interviewees reported including explicitly some aspects of SR/ES in their induction initiatives. Intriguingly, on a few occasions, our research questions triggered some reflection about this –'now that you ask... I am going to take this as something to introduce in our induction programs' (H13).

Recruitment and Selection. Similarly, around thirty per cent of our participants mentioned including specific aspects of SR/ES here: 'we measure the sensibility of the candidate towards social responsibility issues' (H19).

Training. Around eighty per cent of the participants claimed to have some type of training for SR/ES, often to build employees' awareness and skills at work, or to facilitate the transfer of such awareness and skills to their 'homes and at the time of educating their kids' (H06).

Performance appraisal. Less than fifty per cent of our HR participants claimed to have clear, comprehensive, performance-appraisal (individual or group) practices or components tied to SR/ES. Those that were described to us by the participants seemed lightly articulated around the guidelines established by headquarters, tour operators or certifying agencies. They often appeared as "loose" - rather than reflecting clearly set standards woven into employees' performance appraisal systems. The following sentence reflects what we often encountered: 'I cannot say yet that we have impact indicators... We are working on that, we are aware that at the end of the day indicators do speak' (H13).

Compensation Management. Linking compensation to SR/ES results was reported by just a few participants (all in the *Advanced* category), for whom 'the performance results [on SR/ES] do affect directly the variable compensation of the employee' (H11). Usually we were told things along the following lines: 'the results of performance assessment are not yet linked to salary (we will do this in the future)' (H05).

Information. The majority of participants commented on the opportunities offered by SR/ES to 'help the firm become a trustable one' (H12). Also, many managers commented along the following lines: 'In HR we need to make sure that this information reaches people and that everybody understands the same' (H18). In the *Advanced* hotels, participants reported using a broader mix of communication tools and having a clear aim to 'foster a sense of belonging' (H03) [in the workforce].

Work Design. Our sample was selected from organizations which had shown evidence of having some engagement with SR/ES, so most firms were expected to have some relevant internal mechanisms and dedicated items in the organizational and HRM processes. These usually related to certifying requirements and, to a

lesser extent, to strategic plans established by headquarters: 'the strategic plan of social responsibility has the purpose to integrate CSR in the group policies and in all levels of decision making' (H09). But, notoriously, less than twenty per cent of the HR respondents mentioned having fully-dedicated and well-defined budgets to support the SR/ES agenda of their firms. As per the participants' accounts, monetary provision appeared to be irregular, and very much dependent on occasional projects or the "flavor of the year". Only within the *Advanced* hotels group some HR managers reported having annual provisions, tied to concrete projects (and less frequently to concrete measurable outcomes).

Dimension IV. Organization and Roles of HR managers to engage with the SR/ES Agenda

We identified 4 distinctive roles (see Figure 2).

[Figure 2 near here]

Casual. In this category, observed in just a few firms, HR managers have an irregular participation in the development and day-to-day operationalization of SR/ES, getting involved only when demands arise.

Supporter. In this category (around 60%), participants reported being involved in the operational and support execution of SR/ES, but with little influence in its shaping. Interestingly, around sixty per cent of our non-HR experts interviewed lamented that HR managers limited themselves to this "supporter" role.

Advisor. Here, the HR management essentially contributes 'with its own ideas and proposals' (H21) in the definition and development of the SR/ES agenda, offering orientation to other departments on how to move SR/ES forward (e.g. from the point of view of employee-related issues).

Strategic Ally. Here HR experts actively participate in key issues around the SR/ES agenda, in its planning, organization, development and implementation. This seemed to be the case in one third of the organizations: 'because HR is like the guide, is what leads all departments. Depending on their actions, all the staff will be involved' (H28).

Key differences between "Advanced" and "Active" organizations

In the accounts of participants from the group of *'Advanced'* firms in our sample, most HR managers referred to SR/ES as part of the organization's *identity.* Their practices seemed more aligned with SR/ES issues affecting the business, and these managers were more frequently formally responsible for CSR initiatives. Also, the roles of *Advisor* and *Strategic Ally* were more common. It is in this group that our HR participants seemed to exhibit a more nuanced understanding of the environmental (e.g. biophysical, ecosystem) *dependencies* of their organizations, as evidenced in their accounts concerning invasive species, biodiversity protection and conservation programs – 'we have a strong mangrove-reforestation program in the bay, where we offer volunteering activities to expert organizations, guests and groups every year. In summer, we receive guests who work as volunteers.' (H06). Overall, HRM efforts seemed more ambitious, e.g. striving to move from "small wins" to larger projects - 'we have created a cultural program to sensitize employees, the notion of commitment to work, care and preservation was created here by our HR and then generalized everywhere else' (H07). Some HR managers in this group reported on efforts to help "micro-entrepreneurs" and local small businesses, and others commented on their *social funds.* In this group HR managers reported being more concerned about the *development* and socio-economic level of the locations/regions where their hotels were established, and more intent on "activating" employees accordingly.

The group of '*Active*' organizations reported a variety of SR/ES initiatives, not always clearly linked to business needs, and occasional activities seemed more frequent than systematic approaches. Most efforts were internally-focused, while interactions with stakeholders were more frequent at the "material" level. Social and environmental initiatives were reported as being more dependent on, and subject to, the "economic moment" of the firm.

Key differences between Spain, The Dominican Republic and Costa Rica

As stated previously, our research approach did not seek to move beyond the narratives of our participants. As expected, the accounts of our interviewees in the Dominican Republic, the least developed country among the three (as evidenced in most indicators in Table 1), revealed more concerns around 'basic necessities' such as basic education, hygiene, and safety (several participants reported not recommending guests to 'get out of the hotel'), and the government was sometimes characterized as "erratic" and unsupportive of SR/ES efforts. Energy saving efforts were seen as a priority, and many interviewees complained about the temporary nature of corporate foreign investment (and what they saw as prevalent narrow and short-term industry approaches).

In Costa Rica, the accounts of our interviewees seemed more often related to business priorities, and government efforts were seen as a key driver of the Costa Rican 'success around sustainable development and local competitiveness' (H03). Internal and external communication with multiple stakeholders was featured with greater frequency and formality. The inclusion of customers in the hotels' initiatives was often described as a 'prerequisite': 'according to our CST [*Certificación de Sostenibilidad Turística*] we have to involve the external customer. He/she needs to experiment and enter in touch with nature, the culture, so that he/she learns (he is not only here merely to relax)' (H04).

The accounts given by our participants in Spain indicated that they put a stronger emphasis than our other interviewees on the benefit of engaging with SR/ES to foster corporate brand value and to open up new commercial opportunities. Requirements from certifying agencies seemed to be influential in all three countries and, in larger firms, the central headquarters (particularly in Spain), were described as having strong power over subsidiaries. Overall, the analysis of the accounts of our participants reveals remarkable similarities, in which *training* and *communication* were seen as the "favourite" HRM tools. Interestingly, the commitment of the owner or CEO as the key SR/ES driver was mentioned with more emphasis in the locally-owned, smaller hotels, where the narratives placed more importance on fostering local development - in all three countries.

Discussion, a proposed model and implications

From an *optimistic* perspective, the analysis of the narratives of our participants (particularly those of our "advanced" firms) reveals multiple efforts to be celebrated. However, from a *critical* perspective, our results seem to coincide with Jackson et al. (2011) and Zibarras and Coan (2015), suggesting that HR managers may not be deploying the full potential of their expertise (Zappala, 2004). It seems that efforts to align HRM practices with SR/ES aims are not always clearly articulated, a finding similar to those reported by Jabbour, Santos, and Nagano (2010) in their Brazilian study.

It is worth remarking that the sample of this study was (already) composed of firms for which we had some evidence of their SR/ES commitment. However, our findings coincide with Jackson et al.'s (2014) view that many HR professionals seem not to be embracing active roles in companies striving to achieve environmental sustainability. For us, the fact that fewer than twenty per cent of our participants mentioned having fully-dedicated and *well-defined budgets* for their

SR/ES-related initiatives reflects a true challenge for HR managers to become *agents of change* and move beyond casual and supporting roles towards those of advisor or strategic ally.

In our sample, the limited alignment with, and usage of, some HRM practices (such as *performance appraisal* and *compensation* and *rewards* management, which may be crucial for SR/ES purposes: see Berrone & Gomez-Mejia, 2009) seems to us particularly significant. Despite the well-known HR wisdom that maintains that people do what they are rewarded for, many of our respondents seem to be trapped in the "folly" of 'hoping for A but rewarding for B' (Kerr, 1975). In fact, several non-HR participants in this study (particularly sustainability managers) vehemently maintained the need for HRM professionals to become much more active agents and to include sustainability-related criteria in performance and compensation practices for all levels of the organization and 'not just at the executive level' (H15, sustainability manager).

Also, explicit efforts to assess SR/ES initiatives were rarely reported, and our findings coincide with those of Zibarras and Coan (2015), suggesting that only a very small percentage of organizations actually evaluate HRM practices to determine their relative success in promoting pro-environmental outcomes. Particularly surprising was the (overall) limited attention that the role of leadership and line-managers received in the narratives of our participants, despite evidence of their importance in SR/ES agendas (Alcaraz, Hollander, & Navarra, in press). Similarly, a multitude of practices within Ulrich and Brockbank's (2005) *People* dimension (such as coaching, development, and promotion or termination policies) were never mentioned by our interviewees, which may indicate untapped opportunities. Other practices such as induction and recruitment seemed to be only superficially used, despite their value in the sustainability agenda (Subramanian et

al., 2016). Also, comprehensive training efforts, beyond the prevalent and frequent aim of "sensitizing" employees, were not frequently reported.

For most of our participants, engagement with stakeholders translated into interactions with just *a few* actors. Very rarely would our participants report on *systematic* collaborations with a myriad of actors, such as external customers, in helping HRM departments to shape *their own* practices, or collaborations with industry associations or *clusters* for local development ("non traditional" artnerships including NGOs, competitors, social entrepreneurs, governments etc.) whose role in the SR/ES agenda is particularly promising (Kramer & Pfitzer, 2016).

The use of a limited set of HRM practices, and the moderate engagement with a variety of stakeholders, suggest *missed* opportunities. Perhaps more relevant is the fact that many HRM efforts seem more isolated or opportunistic than comprehensive, and that they sometimes have limited connection to the *core environmental and social challenges* that are central to the industry and to the regions of our study (Mowforth et al., 2008), particularly if these are seen through a long-term lens (Bansal & Knox-Hayes, 2013). Overall, the *focus* of the initiatives, and the *strategic* orientation of HRM systems to support or foster SR/ES agendas, were not always obvious. A deep understanding of social and environmental issues, and a careful prioritization of initiatives that would be valued by *external* constituencies or could be translated into competitive advantage (Porter & Kramer, 2011), seemed to be rare.

An externally-oriented HRM architecture to deliver value for the social and environmental agenda

In an attempt to contribute to existing theory, and to guide more focused HRM efforts, from our analysis of the accounts of our participants and our examination of recent literature, we propose next an integrative and externally-oriented HRM

model. We present it here as a conceptual effort aiming to spark further research and scholarly discussion (see Figure 3).

[Figure 3 near here]

Our model assumes and expands the key tenets of Ulrich and Brockbank's (2005) HR Value Proposition. It places particular emphasis on the social and ecological trends that may affect the business, and assumes the need to *mobilize* both internal and external stakeholders in the search to provide value to external communities, including those representing the natural environment (as nature cannot speak for itself). Our model proposes an HRM organization that can orchestrate processes and a set of (wellprioritized) HRM practices. Expanding on the call of Subramanian et al. (2016) for firms and HRM managers to consider ecological knowledge in more comprehensive ways, and taking into account Jackson's (2011) understanding of sustainability, our model has at its centre three key elements: the *firm's priorities*, *communities' flourishing*, and *ecosystems' resilience*. It embraces the 'triple bottom line' tenets (Elkington, 1994), assumes *reinforcing* relations between the three elements, and asserts that potential value creation can be fostered *at their intersection*.

Borrowing the metaphor of 'flourishing' from the influential work of Jackson (2011), our model claims that firms *truly* prosper when they nurture *capabilities* that allow local societies and nearby communities to develop, have opportunities and find meaning and value - within ecological settings and limits. For example, in tourism, fostering *inclusive initiatives* can translate into customers receiving meaningful, responsible touristic experiences (Camilleri, 2016), along with nearby communities getting meaningful opportunities to participate and "have a voice" in

organizational decisions, as well as having economic and employment options, e.g. through small businesses - all activities in which HRM's drive can be vital. The metaphor of 'flourishing' points to more than merely satisfaction (e.g. of customers), and transactional or supportive relations with communities. It adds a connotation that is at the heart of sustainable development (Jackson, 2011). In this context, HRM managers' dialogue with external communities and the understanding of what they see as *value* (for them) is a must (Banerjee, 2011).

Borrowing from the metaphor that is influencing much recent work on sustainability (Whiteman et al., 2013), our model adopts the notion of ecosystems' 'resilience' (Walker et al., 2004) as their capacity to deal with changes and stress, absorb or withstand perturbations, and maintain structure and functions or adapt. The nascent research on ecosystems and management (Winn & Pogutz, 2013) reminds us of issues concerning organizations' dependence on the biophysical ennvironment, issues around biodiversity, and the significance of (time/place) scale: e.g. the small, *local*, dimensions of a sandy shore, or the *regional* dimension of a river basin or an estuary.

More importantly, the research emphasizes the many services that ecosystems provide, beyond *goods and services* and *recreational* opportunities (mostly in tourism areas), including *supporting* services (e.g. water recycling and water quality) and *regulation* services (e.g. climate). In our research, ensuring the resilience of rural ecosystems – e.g. forests and coffee plantations in the case of Costa Rica, and coastal ecosystems such as coral reefs in Spain and the Dominican Republic - on which tourism activities critically depend, was seen as vital by several of our participants. The metaphor of 'resilience' implies more than simply 'protection of the environment' and brings a much needed *systems* perspective, plus a concept that is well known in the domains of HRM (Branicki,

Steyer, & Sullivan-Taylor, 2016). It also highlights the central role of recovery. HRM's dialogue with those representing ecosystems or 'the environment' (e.g. NGOs, government departments) is vital here.

The interdependence between ecosystems' and communities' well-being is certainly well-documented (UNDP, 2014). In our study, aspects of that interdependence were commonly cited by several organizations. For instance, several of our respondents pointed out that the protection of mangrove forests in the Dominican Republic translates into better coastal protection from erosion and from the effects of climate change, more attractive beaches, cleaner water, and richer species habitats, as a result of which both nearby fishing communities and tourism itself can flourish.

Aiming organizational efforts *at the intersection* of the three key elements mentioned would require HR managers (in any industry) to focus on and identify their *firms' priorities in conjunction with* factors that cause *communities to flourish* and *ecosystems to be resilient.* We see Figure 3 as an invitation for HR managers to engage with these notions so that they can align, *concentrate* and prioritize their SR/ES efforts and orchestrate the 'HRM architecture' accordingly. HRM professionals are not alone here, and their collaboration with Sustainability managers is essential (Guerci & Pedrini, 2014).

Practical implications resulting from our research may lead HR managers to deal with hands-on questions such as the ones we describe next. We see them as useful items that could be included (for example) in evaluative, *self-assessment* tools (for each item, priorities can be identified and key actions outlined): To what extent do we understand key aspects of the business context, and how social-ecological trends may affect it (now and in the future)? To what extent are HR actions focusing on the issues with the strongest potential to be translated into

competitive advantage, and to deliver value in the eyes of external stakeholders? To what extent are we taking advantage of key HR practices – e.g. performance appraisal, rewards and recognition? How can we help the organization move "upwards" in key dimensions? – e.g. from philanthropy and ecoefficiency, to strategic orientations; from materially-based interactions with stakeholders, to others that foster significant knowledge exchange and well prioritized actions; from casual and supporting roles to advisory and strategic ones. What are some of the "bottlenecks" in each dimension, and how to address them best?

We see the conceptual relations and metaphors outlined in this paper as adding to existing *integrative* models. They urge HR scholars to embrace current socialecological thinking, and to aim for a strategic *focus* - efforts that should also deal with the (until now only superficially understood) *long-term* scope that should characterize sustainability (Bansal & Knox-Hayes, 2013). We see our research contribution as pointing towards the broader 'shared value creation' quest of Porter and Kramer (2011).

In this sense, we see the following questions as part of a much-needed future *research agenda*: How can synergies be fostered between the five dimensions of the model outlined in Figure 3? How can cross-fertilization be fostered between well-known HR and psychological theories on *human* resilience, and the field of *ecosystems* resilience? What are the "green skills" that may be particularly important for HR managers? How can collaborative, long-term relations with external stakeholders be driven by HR managers? How can HR managers anchor SR/ES progress in "small wins"? What are some of the most efficient HR practices to put sustainability at the heart of the firm's culture and identity? How can inter-disciplinary and ambitious multi-sectorial alliances be established and championed by HR managers?

Concluding remarks

In this paper we have aimed to explore the activities reported by HR managers in firms with SR/ES agendas, through the lens of a (slightly modified) HR value creation model originally outlined by Ulrich and Brockbank (2005). Embracing Banerjee's (2011) concerns to examine not only input-driven but also output-focused sustainability agendas, our empirical (mixed-methods) exploration adopted the *external* focus identified by Kramar (2014) as 'promoting social and environmental health'. From our findings and the literature, we have engaged in a theoretical exercise, crafting another model aiming to help HRM managers in the quest to *focus* efforts on the intersection of their firms' priorities, communities' flourishing needs, and ecosystems' resilience.

Our research should certainly be complemented with *probability* samples, and should move beyond the discourse of individuals to examine the institutional and organizational characteristics that definitely influence HRM's involvement in SR/ES. But perhaps the biggest limitation of our research is captured in Ulrich's (2005) statement that "value is defined by the receiver more than the giver"; it is the eyes of the beholder which may see (or not) value. On this assumption, further research will need to take into account not merely the (often privileged) voices of managers or executives, but also the views and perceptions of external stakeholders, plus (those representing) concrete ecosystems. In other words, beyond normative claims that HR is central to sustainability, the true value of HRM activities – their impact on social and environmental realms - will be determined by others. This will be crucial to advancing and securing SR/ES agendas. Perhaps this important journey has just started.

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Table 1. Data on the travel, tourism and hospitality industry of Spain, the Dominican Republic and Costa Rica

Country Data on Travel and Tourism and Hospitality	Spain	Dominican Republic	Costa Rica
Population (millions), World Bank (2013)	46,6	10,4	4,9
Surface area (square meters, thousands) (World Bank, 2013)	505,6	48,7	51,1
Gross Domestic Product per capita (US $) (World Bank, 2013)	29.118	5.826	10.185
Gross National Income per capita (US $) (World Bank, 2013)	29.180	5.620	9.550
Total Labor Force (thousands) (World Bank, 2013)	23.554	4.633	2.299
Unemployment % (World Bank, 2012)	25,2	13	7,6
Country Brand Index Global (FutureBrand, 2013)	19	53	25
Country Brand Index Latinoamerica (FutureBrand, 2013)		11	3
% Travel and Tourism over Total GDP, 2013 (WTTC 2014)	15,7	15,3	12,1
Tourism Employment (%) over Total Employment 2013 (WTTC,2014)	15,8	14	11,5
International tourist arrivals in 2013 (in thousands) (UNWTO, 2014)	60.661	4.690	2.428
US $ (millions) generated by international tourists in 2013 (UNWTO, 2014)	60.435	5.065	24.827
Tourism/Visitors as % of Total Exports in 2013 (WTTC, 2014)	13,7	35,3	14,2
Number of hotels (INE, 2013; BCCR, 2013; ICT, 2013)	14.822	700	2.515
Number of rooms (Banca March, 2012, Asonahores 2014, ICT, 2013)	1.800.000	60.000	46.633
Ranking in Environmental Performance Index (Yale University, 2014)	7	75	54
Travel and Tourism Competitive Index (World Economic Forum, 2013)	4	86	47
Corruption Perceptions Index (2014)	37	115	47
Human Development Index ranking (UNDP, 2013)	27	102	68

Table 2. Sample description

Hotel's name	Interviews held in	Firm's origin	Operations	Profiles Interv.	Type	Size	Evidence of SR/ES Commitment
NuevaHosp	Spain	USA	Intl	HR	Urban	<250	Green Key Awards
Paraisos	Spain	Spain	Intl	HR & CSR	Beach-City	>250	Green Globe & EarthCheck Certification, National Environmental Reward
Bellevs	Costa Rica	USA	Intl	HR	City	<250	Certification Sustainable Tourism, Blue Flag Ecological Program
Uniones	Costa Rica	Costa Rica	Loc	HR	Rural	<50	Certification in Sustainable Tourism, Member of Cayuga Sustainable Luxury Hotels
Carolina	Costa Rica	Costa Rica	Loc	HR & Sust.	Rural	<50	Certification in Sustainable Tourism, Blue Flag Ecological Program
Berrores	Dom. Rep.	Dom. Rep.	Loc	HR & Sust.	Beach	<250	Caribbean Gold Coast Award
Mjis	Dom. Rep.	Spain	Intl	HR & Sust.	Beach	<250	Blue Flag Certification, Crystal Apple & Golden Apple Awards
Doles	Spain	Spain	Intl	HR & Sust.	Beach	>250	Green Globe Certification, ECPAT & World Code of Ethics of WTO
Nuevo	Spain	Spain	Intl	CSR	Beach	>250	ISO 14001, Member of Code ECPAT
Viejos	Spain	USA	Intl	HR	City	>250	ISO 14001:2004, Sustainability Report, Unicef

							Partner Award
GeneLos	Spain	Spain	Intl	HR	Urban	> 250	ISO 50001 & ISO 14001 Certification, Green Key Certification, GRI A+
Pedrosa	Dom. Rep.	Spain	Intl	HR	Urban	<250	ISO 14001, Biosphere Certification, EMAS European Regulation
Canteras	Dom. Rep.	Dom. Rep.	Loc	HR	Beach	> 250	Partnerships for Social Development Initiatives
Dorotea	Dom. Rep.	USA	Intl	HR & CSR	City	> 250	LEED, Member of Hospitality Sustainable P. Consortium
Verdes	Spain	Spain	Intl	HR	Beach -City	> 250	ISO 14001, Biosphere Certification, EMAS European Regulation
QuintaEs	Dom. Rep.	England	Intl	HR	City	<250	Sustainability Report
Horas	Spain	Spain	Loc	HR	Beach	> 250	Travelife Gold Award
Remeros	Costa Rica	USA	Intl	HR & Sust.	City	> 250	Sustainability Report, LEED Certification, Partnerships for Sustainable Development
Pedrerosa	Dom. Rep.	Spain	Intl	HR	Beach	> 250	Blue Flag & Green Globe Certifications
Hospitalidades	Costa Rica	USA	Intl	Mkt & Sales	City	<250	Certification in Sustainable Tourism
Romeros	Spain	USA	Intl	HR & Sust.	City	<250	Sustainability Report, LEED Certification, Partnerships for Sustainable Development

Azules	Costa Rica	Costa Rica	Loc	HR	Beach	<250	Certification in Sustainable Tourism
Playas	Costa Rica	USA	Intl	HR	Beach	>250	ISO 14001:2004, Sustainability Report, Unicef Partner Award
Dondes	Costa Rica	USA	Intl	HR	Beach	>250	ISO 14001:2004, Sustainability Report, Unicef Partner Award
Carabelas	Spain	Spain	Intl	HR	Beach-City	>250	Green Globe & Blue Flag Certifications
Dominicos	Dom. Rep.	Spain	Intl	HR	Beach	>250	Sustainability Report, Great Place to Work
Guia	Dom. Rep.	USA	Intl	HR	City	>250	Sustainability Report, ISO 14001 & 50001
Parques	Dom. Rep.	Spain	Intl	HR	Beach	>250	Blue Flag Certification

Table 3. Interview protocol and guiding questions

Protocol

Introduction: Participants, research focus, rationale, overview, etc.
Discussion on key research issues (e.g. deliverables)
Ethical issues, permission and context and country issues.

Guiding questions:
How do you *conceive* social responsibility and environmental sustainability? To what extent and how are they relevant for both your industry and your firm?
How is the firm *dealing with issues or priorities* (if any) around social responsibility and environmental sustainability?

What is *the role of the HR department* in dealing with social responsibility and environmental sustainability? What are the main efforts, activities, projects...and the main "drivers" for those? (Please describe briefly)

To what extent and how is the HR department engaging with both internal and external *stakeholders* to materialize social and environmental initiatives? What are the main efforts, activities, projects...? (Please describe briefly)

What are the key *HRM practices* used to foster social responsibility and environmental sustainability - e.g. recruitment, induction, training, performance appraisal, compensation, development plans, etc? How are these used, if at all? (please describe briefly each).

In your view, what are the main *positive impacts* up to date?
How do you see the linkage between social responsibility or environmental sustainability, and the *organizational culture* of the firm?

How is the HR department *organizing and resourcing* itself for social responsibility and environmental sustainability?

What are the *main gaps*, weaknesess ... and where do you see the *highest potential* for HRM to make a meaningful contribution on social and environmental issues?

Table 4. Examples of coding application

Overarching Theme	Interpretative code	Quote
Dimension I: Approaches to business and social & environmental issues	*Approach*	
	Philanthropic	'After the earthquake we sold ice cream in order to obtain money for the community' (H10) 'We ask employees to make a donation for UNICEF (…) or for other causes' (H10)
	Efficiency maximizers	'Sustainability is all the efforts that the corporation makes for saving resources that, at the end, have an impact on the environment and the surrounding communities.' (H27)
	Strategic orientation	[SR] 'constitutes a crucial dimension of the strategy, a central element of our business' (H03). [SR/ES] 'it is part of the strategy and mission statement of the company, cascading down to the rest of the hotels in the chain.' (H01).

Table 5. Firms' distribution by category

Codeo	Category	1 Business and social/environmental Approaches	2. Stakeholders	3. Crafting HR practices	4. Internal Organization and Roles of HR	Mean
H01	Advanced	3,00	4,88	3,83	5,00	4,18
H02	Advanced	4,00	4,13	4,38	4,25	4,19
H03	Advanced	5,00	4,38	4,50	4,75	4,66
H04	Advanced	5,00	4,63	4,83	4,75	4,80
H05	Advanced	4,50	3,88	3,63	5,00	4,25
H06	Advanced	5,00	4,75	3,83	3,75	4,33
H07	Advanced	5,00	4,88	5,00	4,75	4,91
H08	Active	2,75	2,88	1,29	3,25	2,54
H09	Active	1,75	2,75	3,50	2,50	2,63
H10	Active	2,50	2,75	2,42	2,50	2,54
H11	Active	4,00	3,38	3,04	3,75	3,54
H12	Active	3,25	3,25	3,17	3,00	3,17
H13	Active	2,00	3,13	2,88	2,25	2,56
H14	Active	3,25	3,13	3,38	2,75	3,13
H15	Active	4,00	3,17	3,50	3,75	3,60
H16	Active	3,50	2,63	2,88	2,25	2,81
H17	Active	1,00	1,13	1,00	1,00	1,03
H18	Active	2,50	2,00	2,00	2,25	2,19
H19	Active	1,00	2,38	1,00	1,25	1,41
H20	Active	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00
H21	Active	2,00	1,88	2,13	1,50	1,88
H22	Active	2,50	2,75	2,96	1,00	2,30
H23	Active	1,50	1,13	2,00	1,00	1,41
H24	Active	1,75	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,19
H25	Active	1,75	2,50	2,00	1,50	1,94
H26	Active	1,75	2,50	2,50	2,25	2,25
H27	Active	1,75	2,00	2,00	2,00	1,94
H28	Active	1,00	1,50	1,50	1,50	1,38

Figure 1. HR managers' interactions with (internal and external) stakeholders in the SR/ES agenda
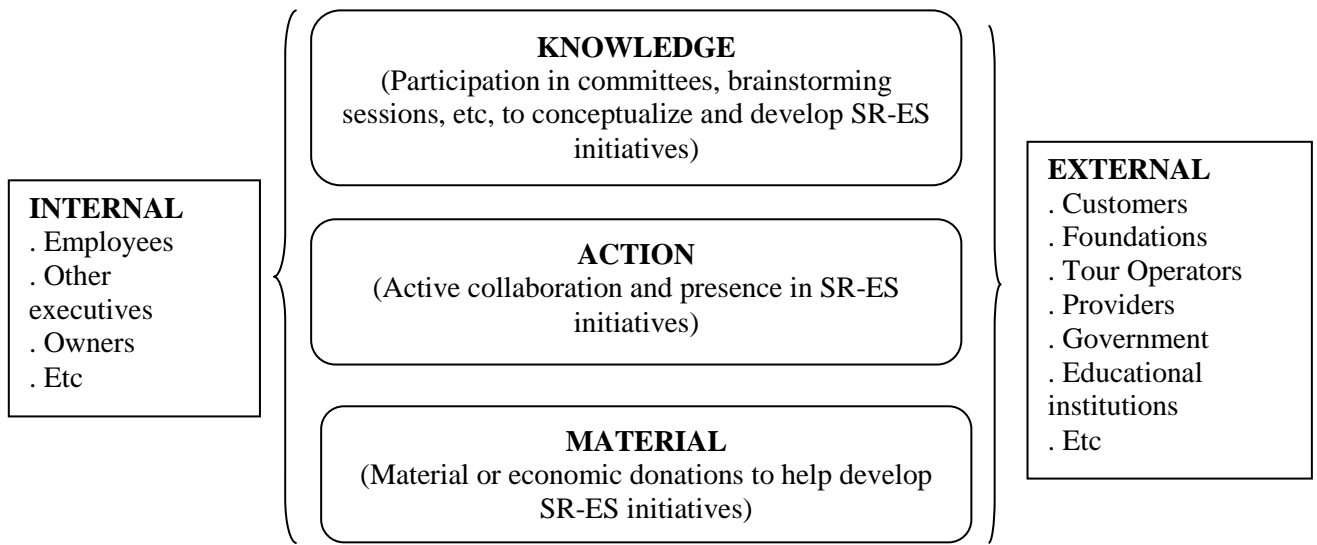
INTERNAL
. Employees
. Other executives
. Owners
. Etc

KNOWLEDGE
(Participation in committees, brainstorming sessions, etc, to conceptualize and develop SR-ES initiatives)

ACTION
(Active collaboration and presence in SR-ES initiatives)

MATERIAL
(Material or economic donations to help develop SR-ES initiatives)

EXTERNAL
. Customers
. Foundations
. Tour Operators
. Providers
. Government
. Educational institutions
. Etc

Figure 2. HR managers' roles in the SR-ES agenda.

Participation in the *Strategic planning* of SR/ES

+

| ADVISOR | STRATEGIC ALLY |

-

| CASUAL | SUPPORTER |

-          +

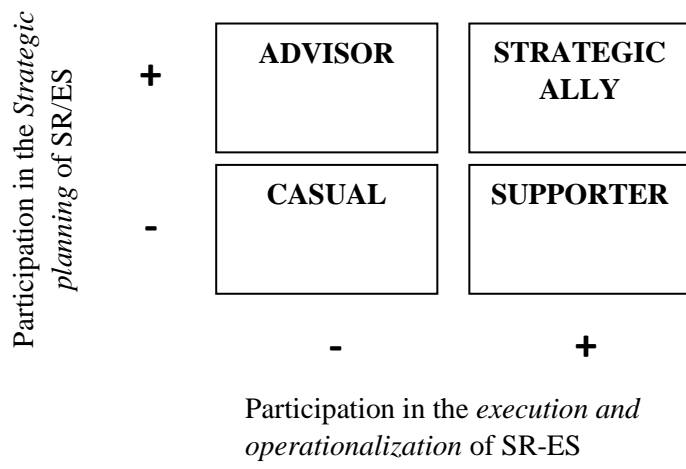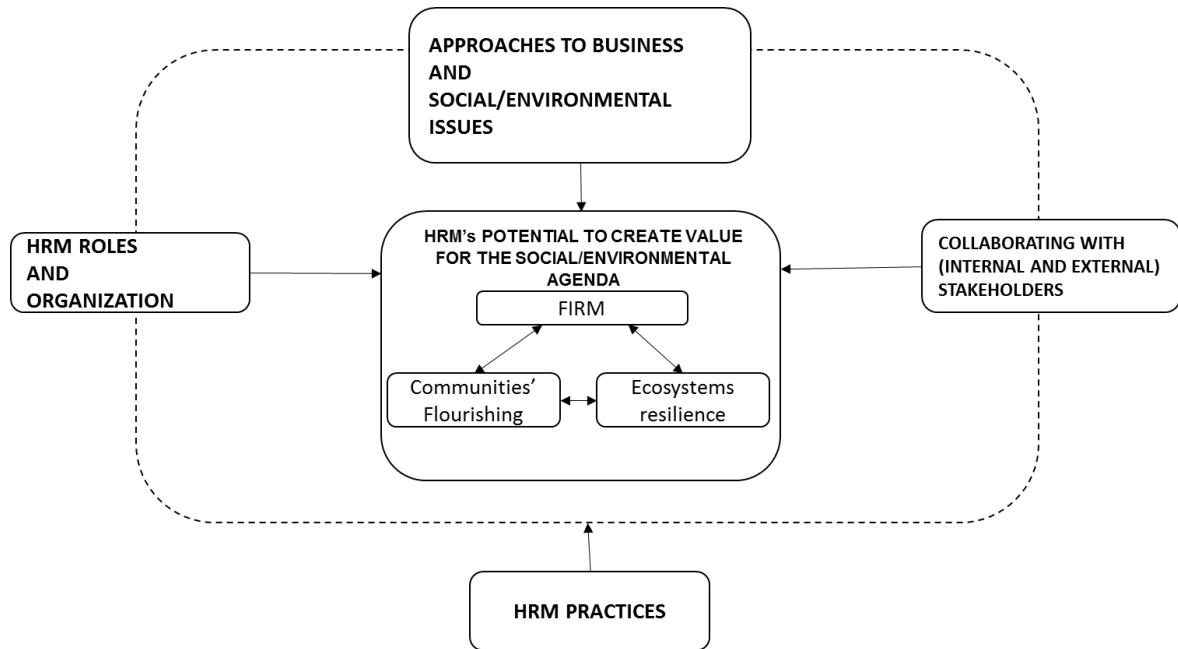Participation in the *execution and operationalization* of SR-ES

Figure 3. An *externally-oriented* HRM architecture to deliver value for the social and environmental agenda.

(Adapted from Jackson, 2011; Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005; Winn and Pogutz, 2013)