



The tension between the mutual gains and conflicting outcomes perspective: the role of soft skills

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Acknowledgements

The added value of having a master's degree in Portugal.

The sentence that was always on my mind during this process. Why? I could answer in two parts. First, it could serve as a professional differentiation, but it's hard for Portuguese companies to understand how to capitalize on young people with a master's degree. Second, it could allow personal development for the student taking the master's, and yes, that's it!

While writing this dissertation, I learned a lot about myself. First, I can work in a full-time job and still organize myself to write my dissertation. I can manage my emotions to be 100% in both - my work and my master's. I can stick to my ambitions and not give up when times get more challenging.

The aim of this study was related to soft skills development. I was the prominent individual that developed all three in analysis: adaptability because I learned how to adapt to different moments and how to adapt to high peaks of work in my company and conciliate with writing my thesis; time management because I learned about how to manage my time towards work-life balance; and communication, because I studied a lot to know how to write a thesis in a formal touch.

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Resumo

O objetivo deste estudo é analisar a perspectiva de ganhos mútuos e resultados conflitantes e o papel da aposta no desenvolvimento de *soft skills* para, em primeiro lugar, perceber se estas *soft skills* podem mitigar os efeitos negativos na perspectiva de resultados conflitantes e, em segundo lugar, se pode contribuir para reforçar a perspectiva de ganhos mútuos.

Durante décadas, a Gestão de Recursos Humanos viu a aposta no bem-estar dos funcionários como um custo e não como um investimento que permitiria que a empresa alcançasse o sucesso. A contribuição deste estudo para a área em causa é ajudar o departamento de RH a entender que desenvolver *soft skills*, como adaptabilidade, comunicação e gestão do tempo, ajuda a mitigar alguns problemas negativos internos nas empresas, reforçando a perspectiva de ganhos mútuos e minimizando os efeitos da perspectiva de resultados conflitantes.

Para este estudo foi realizado um método qualitativo. Foram realizadas seis entrevistas a jovens empregados de diferentes empresas portuguesas, todos da área de gestão/economia. As principais conclusões prendem-se, em primeiro lugar, com o facto de que nas empresas que parecem adotar a perspectiva de ganhos mútuos, o desenvolvimento das *skills* de comunicação e gestão do tempo são as que mais ajudariam as empresas a resolver alguns problemas internos, tais como, *turnover* tóxico, ansiedade e stress e o relacionamento negativo entre os funcionários. Em segundo lugar, os entrevistados que trabalham em empresas que parecem adotar a perspectiva de resultados conflitantes concordaram que o desenvolvimento de *skills* como a adaptabilidade e gestão de tempo pode mitigar os efeitos negativos de entender o bem-estar dos funcionários como um custo.

Abstract

The aim of this study is to analyze the mutual gains and conflicting outcomes perspective and the role of developing soft skills to, first, understand if it might mitigate the negative effects in the conflicting outcomes perspective and, secondly, if it might contribute to support the mutual gains perspective.

During decades, HRM saw employees' well-being as a cost and not as an investment that would lead the company to success. The contribution of this study to the field is to help HR department understand that developing soft skills, such as, adaptability, communication and time management, helps to mitigate some negative issues, providing support for the mutual gains perspective.

For this study, a qualitative method was conducted. Six interviews were realized with young employees from different Portuguese companies, all from the management/economic area. The main conclusions were that, first, the companies that seem to adopt the mutual gains perspective, communication and time management are the soft skills that would help more the companies to solve some internal issues, such as, constant and toxic turnover, anxiety and stress and the relationship among employees; secondly, the interviewees that work in companies that seem to adopt the conflicting outcomes perspective, agreed that developing adaptability and time management skills might mitigate the negative effects of less attention paid to employee well-being.

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1. Introduction

Human resource management (HRM) refers to the pattern of planned human resource deployments and activities intended to enable an organization to achieve its goals (Wright & McMahan, 1992).

Over the last decade, the field of human resource management has witnessed a progression through several stages, starting with the initial excitement and research around the convincing argument that HR practices should be considered as a system. When these practices are well implemented can enhance organizational performance. The empirical tests of this argument and the critiques of the growing field accompanied by propositions for how thinking on the topic can be expanded and improved (Nishii & Wright, 2007).

There are many theories on how to achieve improved employee performance (e.g., commitment-oriented HRM activities) but, there is not general consensus about their effectiveness (Edgar et. al, 2015). Indeed, there have been recent concerns expressed in the literature that routes to achieving performance are often extracted by organizations at the cost of employees' well-being (Gavin and Mason, 2004) – the conflicting outcomes perspective.

On other hand, there is a perspective that suggests that employees and employers' benefit from HRM, and therefore HRM fosters employee well-being – the mutual gains perspective - as the most effective way to achieve company's goals (Kloutsiniotis et al., 2021).

In other words, there are two theoretical viewpoints about employees' well-being and organizational performance: the mutual gains and conflicting outcomes perspectives (Ogbonnaya & Messersmith, 2018).

In this way, three research questions arise.

- Is HRM still focused only on the company's economic results like what happened during decades or is there already some concern with people's well-being?
- What is the role of soft skills and how do they relate to company's results and the workers' well-being?
- How can the soft skills mitigate the negative effects on employees of a focus on company results as advocated by the conflicting outcomes perspective? And in the case of mutual gains, why is there an effective investment in soft skills contributing to make it work?

To answer these research questions, a qualitative study was conducted. Six interviews were done with active employees of Portuguese companies. The main purpose of the interviews was to figure out whether the interviewees' work context can be described as the mutual gains or conflicting outcomes perspective and the role of soft skills on it. Additionally, questions were raised to understand the role played by developing adaptability, communication, and time management skills in the interviewees' perspective.

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. First, a brief introduction to the theme; secondly, the literature review about the key topics of the study, then the methodology adopted. To conclude, the analysis of the results collected, a brief presentation of the study's main conclusions, and a description of limitations and future research ideas.

2. Literature review

This chapter reviews the current literature, identifies some gaps, and discusses the key concepts of the relevant topics for the development of the present dissertation: The tension between the mutual gains and conflicting outcomes perspective: the role of soft skills.

2.1. Human resources management (HRM)

Human resources management is conceptualized as a set of designed combinations of practices towards organizational effectiveness and hence better performance outcomes (Boselie, et. al, 2005). Wright and McMahan (1992) define it as: “The planned HR deployments and activities intended to enable (an organization) to achieve its goals”.

A dominant theme in HRM research is the notion that individual HRM practices are interconnected and should therefore be examined in bundles, rather than in isolation, to encourage desirable outcomes (Appelbaum, et. al, 2000; Macky & Boxall, 2007).

When used together in a consistent manner, individual HRM practices are mutually supportive of each other and might induce complementary effects. This approach is based on the idea of “internal fit” among HRM practices, which means that each practice will enhance and support the effectiveness of another (Delery, 1998). Unless HRM practices are “bundled” or used together in coherent systems, their actual relevance and impact on outcomes may be underutilized.

On the one hand, the “Best practices” school translate that firms will see performance improvements if they implement (universal) “best practices” of managing people irrespective of context. Pfeffer (1994: 1998) argues that human resource (HR) ‘best practices’ can increase company profits, and that this conclusion holds good for all organizations and industries irrespective of their context.

Anchored in the “Best fit” perspective, the concept of HR system was developed to encapsulate the idea that HRM is more effective when policies and practices are consistent

and appropriately integrated/aligned with their specific organizational and environmental context.

HR systems are combinations or integrated sets of interrelated, consistent, and mutually reinforcing HR policies and practices that have the potential to create positive synergies and send consistent signals about the organization's underlying intentions to achieve substantially enhanced performance related outcomes (Posthuma et al. 2013).

As a result, various HRM systems have been introduced to the field. The first groundbreaking distinction was between control and commitment HR bundles. (e.g., Lepak et al., 2006; Mossholder, Richardson, & Settoon, 2011; Verburg, Den Hartog, & Koopman, 2007). Control and commitment HR systems represent two distinct approaches to aligning employee actions with organizational goals. Newer, research approach is the combination of HR practices into a so-called high-performance work system (e.g., Huselid, 1995; Posthuma et al., 2013).

Therefore, HRM scholars have argued that a set of related HRM practices can improve performance through increased employee involvement (Guthrie, Spell and Nyamori 2002), commitment (Guest 1997), and empowerment (Kochan and Osterman 1994). This set of HRM systems has been called a variety of names, including 'high involvement work system' (HIWS) (Edwards and Wright 2001), 'high commitment work system' (HCWS) (Arthur 1992), or 'high performance work system' (HPWS) (Huselid 1995).

It's important to note that high involvement HR system and high-performance work systems are not the same. High involvement HR system mean broadly defined tasks, receive extensive amounts of training and compensation as a combination of high levels of salary and group-oriented bonus schemes such as profit sharing and stock ownership. In the high-performance work system, the assumption is that employees are best typified as "complex men" adapting their preferences and abilities to match tasks and context. In practice, this represents an allocation of employees to the right tasks through rigorous selection and promotion practices, development through intensive and needs-targeted training, motivation by a mixture of extrinsic rewards that need to fit specific organizational requirements, among others.

Researchers have further suggested that employees' actual perceptions of HRM systems are more proximal to employees' workplace behaviors and therefore better determinants of their performance (Alfes, Shantz, & Truss, 2012; Truss et al., 2013). When HRM practices are used together in a consistent manner, they afford employees an opportunity to make subjective attributions about their work environment, leading to outcomes that are typically attitudinal in nature (Van De Voorde & Beijer, 2015). Thus, to examine employee-level outcomes of HRM systems, it is sensible to focus on employees' perceptions of such systems (Truss et al., 2013).

About the position of employee well-being in the HRM and organizational performance relationship, there are two different perspectives: the “mutual gains” and the “conflicting outcomes” perspective (Van De Voorde et al., 2012).

Over the past 30 years, theory, and research on HRM has made considerable progress. Now there's a clearer understanding about the strategic role of external and internal fit (Boxall and Purcell, 2022), about the process whereby HRM can be linked to performance (Jiang et al., 2012), about its association with firm performance (Paauwe et al., 2013) and about the challenges of managing effective implementation (Bowen and Ostroff, 2004).

2.2. The mutual gains versus the conflicting outcomes perspective

Although an extensive body of research has documented the benefits of coherent systems of human resource management (HRM) practices (Jiang, et al., 2012; Van De Voorde, et al., 2012), critical questions remain regarding the actual influence of such systems on employee performance and well-being (Ogbonnaya & Messersmith, 2018).

There is substantial evidence that HRM systems promote different measures of organizational performance (Jiang et al., 2012; Van de Voorde et al., 2012). However, when it comes to employees' perceptions and reactions to HRM systems, a less succinct picture begins to emerge, raising questions as to whether HRM systems are indeed beneficial for employees. The body of research on employees' experiences of HRM systems is structured around two theoretical viewpoints: the mutual gains and conflicting outcomes perspectives (Ogbonnaya & Messersmith, 2018).

The “mutual gains” perspective suggests that everyone, employees and employers, benefit from HRM, and thus HRM fosters employee well-being, which results in improved operational and financial performance (Kloutsiniotis et al., 2021). HRM systems—including staff training, selective hiring, performance appraisal, workplace support, team working, and job autonomy—promote performance benefits by aligning employees' interests more closely with organizational goals (Guest, 2017; Van de Voorde et al., 2012). It creates a “win–win” situation given that employee well-being is enhanced, and performance is strengthened. (Ogbonnaya & Messersmith, 2018).

By contrast, the “conflicting outcomes” perspective suggests employee well-being might have a negative effect on the company results. In other words, concern for the workers' well-being represents a cost. In detail, the main argument is that it can lead to work intensification, make work more challenging and increase employee feelings of being exploited (Jensen et al., 2013; Kroon et al., 2009). In that way, employee positive health outcomes can be reduced (Oppenauer and van de Voorde, 2018, p. 313). HRM systems optimize employees' skills and performance, but with little or no benefit to their well-being (Ogbonnaya, et al., 2017).

These competing views remain at the heart of HRM research and highlight the possibility of trade-offs between the performance and well-being benefits of HRM systems.

2.2.1. The mutual gains perspective

The mutual gains perspective stipulates shared benefits for both the organization and employees (Van de Voorde et al., 2012). The key assumption is that HRM systems create a win–win situation in which positive employee attitudes are critical for achieving performance improvements (Appelbaum et al., 2000). As a managerial strategy that applies throughout the workplace, HRM systems provide the necessary operational control for employees to maximize their skills and perform their jobs in ways that are consistent with organizational goals (Guest, 2017; Takeuchi et al., 2009).

This perspective argues that employees experience improved job quality and feel a stronger sense of attachment towards the organization, all leading to performance benefits

(Ogbonnaya & Messersmith, 2018). Scholars have proposed the view that organizational outcomes may be too distal for assessing the impact of HRM systems (Truss et al., 2013; Ogbonnaya et al., 2017; Takeuchi et al., 2009). As a result, proponents of the mutual gains paradigm are paying more attention to the mediating role of employee outcomes in relation to HRM systems and organizational performance. Within this realm, employees' workplace attitudes and behaviors are seen as important mechanisms for explaining the performance benefits of HRM systems.

Previous studies have reported significant links between HRM systems and employee commitment (e.g., Gong et al., 2009; Gould-Williams, 2003; Ogbonnaya et al., 2017; Paré & Tremblay, 2007). For example, Paré and Tremblay's (2007) study of 394 Canadian workers, showed HRM practices are positively related to both the affective and continuance dimensions of commitment. Similarly, Gong et al.'s (2009) study of Chinese firms showed evidence that workers' level of commitment is enhanced as HRM practices are perceived to be valuable for their job performance.

Drawing on social exchange theory, some studies, for example, Gould-Williams 's (2003) and Ogbonnaya et al.'s (2017) explore the mediating role of employee commitment in the HRM–performance relationship. The studies expose that when employers invest in HRM practices, they send signals that indicate employees represent a major source of competitive advantage for the organization. In turn, employees perceive these signals as favorable treatment from the employer and reciprocate through a greater sense of organizational attachment. With increased organizational attachment, employees are more likely to exert themselves on behalf of the organization.

2.2.2. The conflicting outcomes perspective

The conflicting outcomes perspective portrays HRM systems as a strategy for imposing greater work demands on employees, with little or no benefit to their well-being (Macky & Boxall, 2008; Ogbonnaya et al., 2017; Ramsay et al., 2000).

The logic behind this perspective is that harsh economic conditions and labor market competition place undue pressures on employers to follow an intensification approach

towards improving organizational performance (Ogbonnaya et al., 2017). Under greater external pressures, employers adopt HRM systems to enhance employee effort and elicit greater value from human capital resources, with little emphasis placed on employee well-being (Ramsay et al., 2000). The critical perspective owes its roots to the “labor process” paradigm in which employers, in an effort to drive organizational performance, engage employees through heightened work demands and longer working hours, without providing adequate levels of support (Ramsay et al., 2000). Within such systems, employees feel pressured to work too hard and undertake too many job tasks, leading to greater perceptions of stressful work (Ogbonnaya & Messersmith, 2018).

Although the conflicting outcomes perspective has received less scholarly attention than the mutual gains perspective, existing research tends to focus on employees' experience of stress-related outcomes (e.g., Boxall & Macky, 2014; Kroon et al., 2009; Macky & Boxall, 2008; Ogbonnaya & Valizade, 2015). Work-related stress is an employee well-being outcome characterized by the tendency to feel tense, exhausted, restless, or anxious in the context of work. Under the conflicting outcomes perspective, job demands are seen as the main mediating mechanism for explaining the stress-related effects of HRM systems (e.g., Kroon et al., 2009; Macky & Boxall, 2008).

Job demands are defined as the amount of work effort expended in relation to the number of hours invested in undertaking one's job (Macky & Boxall, 2008). Kroon et al.'s (2009) study of 393 employees nested within 86 organizations found evidence that HRM practices influence workers' experience of emotional exhaustion through heightened work demands. Kroon et al. (2009) argued that HRM systems stimulate stress-related outcomes because they are designed to elicit greater work effort from employees. Similarly, Ogbonnaya et al.'s (2017) comparative study of British workers found evidence that HRM practices are associated with higher levels of work intensity, which in turn induces stressful work patterns.

2.3. HR Attribution

As previously mentioned, strategic human resources management (SHRM) researchers have sought to understand the ways in which a firm's human resource practices are

associated with its performance, and they have amassed impressive research on the topic over the last two decades.

Although scholars have converged in their belief that HR practices are associated with organizational performance through their influence on employee attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Huselid, 1995; Wright, McCormick, Sherman, & McMahan, 1999; Wright, McMahan & McWilliams, 1994), Bowen and Ostroff (2004), and Nishii and Wright (2007) have suggested that the causal relationship may be more complex than previously thought. They suggest that employees' perceptions of HR practices are likely to precede the employee attitudes and behavior links in the causal chain. That is, for HR practices to exert their desired effect on employee attitudes and behaviors, they first have to be perceived and interpreted subjectively by employees in ways that will engender such attitudinal and behavioral reactions.

As all, HR attributions are attributions workers make about management's purpose in implementing the actual HR practices. They represent the intentions that people attribute to managers and that led them to adopt the practices. For example, the management adopts practices that appear to show concern for well-being. But if workers attribute to that practice a fake concern, they will not take those measures seriously and will not react positively, as the management had hoped.

This concept will be important for the study because some perceptions of the employees might have a bigger impact than the best practice itself.

2.4. Soft Skills

Soft skills are essentially people skills – the non-technical, intangible, personality-specific skills that determine one's strengths as a leader, listener, negotiator, and conflict mediator. In other words, soft skills refer to personality traits, social graces, facility with language, personal habits, friendliness, and optimism that mark people to varying degrees (Alex, 2009, p.3). According to Laker and Powell (2011), soft skills refer also both to intrapersonal skills, such as the ability to manage oneself, and to interpersonal skills, such as managing interactions with others.

In the workplace, companies were told, for years, to focus exclusively on cognitive abilities, hard skills. (Kyllonen, 2013). A generation was taught that other variables, such as soft, social, and emotional skills, were unrelated to workforce outcomes.

A lot of scholars have been doing research about the importance of soft skills in the workplace (Klaus, 2010; Maes, Weldy, & Icenogel, 1997; Nealy, 2005). One of the studies found that 75% of long-term job success depends on people skills, while only 25% is dependent on technical knowledge (Klaus, 2010). Another study indicated that hard skills contribute only 15% to one's success, whereas 85% of success is due to soft skills. As employers are progressively looking for employees who are mature and socially well adjusted, they rate soft skills as number one in importance for entry-level success on the job (Wilhelm, 2004).

As all, today's workplace is showing that technical skills are not enough to keep individuals employed when organizations are right-sizing and cutting positions (James & James, 2004). Because soft skills are crucial for productive performance in today's workplace, current and future business leaders are emphasizing the development of soft skills and being much more aware as the time goes by (Nealy, 2005).

According to an article from the Saviom, the soft skills that will become prominent in 2030, frequently referred to as "4 C's," include critical thinking, creative thinking, communicating, and collaborating. These skills are crucial to employee success (Saviom, 2021).

Having that in mind and for the current study, the soft skills in analysis are adaptability, communication, and time management. Adaptability is an individual's ability to adjust to changes, internal and external, in their own environment. (Keller, 2020). Communication is the act of giving, receiving, and sharing information (Common Sense Media, 2020). Time management is the process of organizing and planning how to divide the time between different activities and tasks (MindTools, n.d.).

The main goal of this study is to understand if developing the soft skills might mitigate any effect of the conflicting outcomes and understand if, in the case of the mutual gains, is there a connection between the investment in soft skills and the benefits employees and employers feel.

3. Methodology

In this chapter, the strategy and procedure adopted to collect the data is presented.

Serving as a reminder, the main questions this study aims to answer are the following:

- Is HRM still focused only on the company's economic results like what happened during decades or is there already some concern with people's well-being?
- What is the role of soft skills and how do they relate to company's results and the workers' well-being?
- How can the soft skills mitigate the negative effects on employees of a focus on company results as advocated by the conflicting outcomes perspective? And in the case of mutual gains, why is there an effective investment in soft skills contributing to make it work?

Hereupon, the method chosen was a qualitative study allowing to examine in-depth the issues at stake and explore the impressions, viewpoints, and experiences of the participants.

Qualitative research seeks to delve into a topic to gain insights into people's motivations, ideas, and attitudes. This approach provides a more detailed understanding of the questions so, and having the questions above presented as the base, it was the model that made more sense.

Interviews were conducted with six different active employees, working in a Portuguese company. The interviews were recorded, and every single interviewed complied with that procedure.

One interview was done in person and the other five were done digitality. From those five interviews, three were done through Microsoft Teams and two were done by cell phone. The data base was collected by listening to the recordings of the interviews, followed by the transcription of them to an excel sheet.

All interviewees were contacted by personal message, as everyone was individually chosen for the current study. People were selected due to being known by the interviewer. The interviews were done in private places by the researcher so that no external noise would affect or influence the quality and truthiness of the data.

The longest interview took one hour and fifteen minutes and the shortest one took forty-five minutes. On average, each interview took approximately fifty minutes.

The interview guide was divided into four parts aligned with the question research. (*Appendix 1 – Interview guide*)

The first part included four questions focused on the professional context of the interviewees. They were asked about their current professional position, for how long they are in the company and what are their current tasks and weekly job.

The second part of the interview had as its goal understanding whether the interviewees' context could be integrated in the mutual gains or conflicting outcomes perspective. Having as a base some practices existing in both perspectives found in the literature, the interviewees were asked about them in an exhaustive and detailed way.

In the third part, they were asked about the negative impact of HR practices with the expectation of understanding if there is dark side associated with them.

In the last part, they were asked about their companies developing the soft skills in study – the goal was to understand if their companies developed those soft skills in the employees. After understanding what the companies do already, the questions were related to understanding what would be the effect in reversing possible dark side practices if more was done in terms of development soft skills such as adaptability, communication, and time management.

It's also important to note that every interviewee consented to the recording of the interview.

In the next section, a detailed analysis of the results is presented.

4. Analysis

In this section, the main characteristics of the interviewees are presented, and the data collected is analyzed. As pointed out above, the data were collected through individual interviews.

After a brief description of the interviewees' context, the analysis is organized addressing each one of the research questions.

4.1. The interviewees and their context

One of the essential parts of understanding the current study is understating the context of our sample. The type of company or the years they work there are highly relevant to understand better their answers about the practices.

In the table below, the interviewees' characteristics are presented composing a brief description of demographic data relative to the six interviewees.

Table 1: Demographic data relative to six interviewees

	Gender	Age	Years of professional experience	Labour relationship	What's your professional position?
Interviewee A	Female	24	2 years	Internship	Business Intelligence
Interviewee B	Female	23	Less than 1 year	Work contract	Tax consulting analyst
Interviewee C	Male	23	Less than 1 year	Internship	IT Strategy
Interviewee D	Female	23	Less than 1 year	Work contract	Auditor Staff 2
Interviewee E	Female	25	3 years	Work contract	Consultant assistant
Interviewee F	Female	26	4 years	Work contract	Consultant

It is important to note that all of them work, in one way or another, in the management or economic area, doing tasks with a high level of complexity. Many have a well-defined procedure on how to do the tasks, and others need to study a lot by themselves to understand how to do the tasks.

4.2. What's the role of employee well-being in the HRM-organizational performance relationship?

All the six interviewees were asked about the practices adopted in their companies and, in particular, about the impact of these practices on the well-being of employees, and the intentions (attributions) they attribute to their adoption, in order to understand whether the company is approaching mutual gains or conflicting outcomes.

The first question was related to the allocation of tasks in their companies. The goal of the question was to understand if those tasks were allocated because the employee showed interest in doing the task or according to the company's needs.

Question 1: How does task allocation work in your company? In your case, were you assigned to these tasks because you already had previous experience (or interest) in these tasks or was it according to the company's needs? How does it work?

Except for Interviewee F, all interviewees explained that the tasks are allocated according to the company's needs. Interviewee E and Interviewee B added that the tasks are the same depending on the professional category, "...everyone who enter in the company for my position, do the same tasks according to the needs..." (Interviewee B).

Interviewee F explained that "*they don't have weekly tasks...we have projects... according to those projects, we are the ones who organize our weekly or monthly tasks...no one delegates.*". It was clear, from the reply, her discomfort about this situation of not having anyone who helped her to define the tasks. This situation might show that the company does not believe that her well-being leads to the company's results.

The following question aimed to understand if the employees thought their professional experience followed a typical path compared to other people in their companies.

Question 2: Would you say that your experience follows a common pattern in the company? Or was it different from what you perceive to happen with the other collaborators?

On one hand, interviewee A, C and F answered that the experience is entirely different depending on their manager and team. Interviewee C even claimed that the experience is "*completely different*" and it "*depends on the team where that person is*". He added "*each boss manages*

according to what he thinks is best and therefore different from each other.” (Interviewee C). In this case, it’s possible to conclude that if the manager is a good leader and the team is a group of people easy to work with, the experience will be good, but otherwise, the experience will not be good.

On the other hand, interviewee E answered positively saying *“I feel that people who enter are accompanied in the same way...”* showing that everyone who entered in the company was managed in the same way, showing a good alignment with the human resources department.

Interviewee B and D showed uncertainty when answering this question. They both pointed that the experience could follow a similar path due to the type of tasks they do but at the same time different because of the context they’re inserted in, claiming that *“...on the one hand, it is similar due to the tasks you perform, on the other hand, the type of client and the place you are...it can be very different, which makes the experience different for each one.”* (Interviewee D).

In conclusion, interviewee C, D and E exposed a positive perception about the path people follow when entering the company, showing that not only the practice is well implemented but the perception of it is positive too.

The third question was related to the promotions. The goal was to understand how the promotions happened in the company and if everyone knew the criteria and was happy with the process behind it.

Question 3: How are promotions made at your company? In the case they exist, are the criteria known by everyone? And in your case, have you already been promoted? What was this promotion for?

Interviewee B, C and D detailed presented the process about how the promotion system works in their companies, showing that it’s a subject addressed and defined in their companies. Interviewee D pointed *“...right at the beginning, they talk about how you can get a promotion... you enter with X salary but that at the end of the year, your position is reviewed...”*.

Otherwise, interviewee E also claimed that the promotion system exists and works but she pointed that *“...it's a bit TABU, in terms of how you can do it. They always tell you that it depends on you and in the way you do and accomplish your tasks, however they don't specify what you need to do...”*. In this case, the system exists, and the employee is aware of it but the criteria are unknown.

Interviewee A and F showed some dissatisfaction with that process. Interviewee A said *“It's a tabu subject...it is a topic that is not discussed much. I know it happens, but I don't know the criteria or what is needed for you to get a promotion...”*. For interviewee F, *“There are no criteria, it's a tabu subject and the promotion depends on whether people liked you or not.”* which shows that promotions are based on personal preferences rather than professional performance.

Clearly, interviewee A and F showed that the practice does not exist which makes them frustrated and interviewee E showed that her perception is negative about it. She knows it exists but the way the company addressed the topic frustrates her. Both situations lead to some frustration.

The following two questions were related to the training policy, aiming to understand if they received any when they entered and about regular updates on their know-how.

Question 4: When you started your role, were you provided with specific training? Do you have other training or regular updates?

Question 5: Is there a general policy on training, or are decisions made on a case-by-case basis, according to identified needs of the employees?

Interview C, D and E indicated that they received training when they entered and gave good feedback and perception about it. Interviewee E even said, *“One of the advantages of my company is the training”*. Interviewee C explained that his company have an internal platform to train the employees and that when he entered, he had access to training on the technology /activities of the company, the sector, and his role. However, he said that *“... missed some specific training...”* for the tasks he would do but he also recognizes that his area, strategy, is a subjective and you learn by doing. Overall, his feedback is positive about the training policy. Interviewee D explained that when she entered, she had two full

weeks of training and that “...at specific times the company also provides training... So yes, there is a regular update.”.

Interviewee A, B and F had a more negative view saying that the training policy is inconsistent and not good. Interviewee A said that she gave her feedback to her boss, saying “... one of the types of feedback I gave to my boss was related with training policy. They don't prepare people too well when they enter the company...”. She added “...In the beginning I had training on the tasks, but it was only it. The problem here is that when you have doubts, you have to interrupt the work of others and that is very demotivating for a newcomer.”. In her case, it's clear to conclude that not having training made her work harder and negatively affected her motivation and well-being.

Interviewee B said that she didn't have training, saying “...when I joined, I didn't have an intensive week of training because that happens usually in September, and I joined in early 2022.”. This clearly affected her motivation as she is one of the interviewees that is less motivated to perform her work.

Interviewee F said that she also didn't receive any training and that she was “...thrown to the lions” which represents a feeling of loneliness at a stage when she most needed to feel supported. She added “I was not given any training when I joined, the only one I had was about writing and nothing else.”.

With this training questions, we conclude that only interviewee C, D and E received training to better perform their tasks. This shows that the company sees investment in training a way to lead to results, always putting the employee in the center.

The next question was related to their motivation. The question aimed to understand if they are motivated in their current job.

Question 6: In general, would you say you feel motivated? Why?

Interviewee C and E answered positively and explained that they are motivated due to “...*the fact that they always provide us with new challenges...*” (Interviewee E) and “...*because of the trust my boss puts in me and the validation she provides of work*” (Interviewee C).

Interviewee B and F answered negatively claiming that they “...*don't like the tasks...find the team too controlling.*” (Interviewee B) And they would “...*like to try another department...*” (Interviewee F). The other two employees, interviewee A and D showed inconsistency in their answers, saying that their motivation “... *depends on the moments and it depends a lot on the clients*” (Interviewee D).

Then, the interviewees were asked about their next steps in the company and if they thought that for them to accomplish what they wanted, they would need to leave the company.

Question 7: In the short run, what are your professional goals? Do you feel that you will be able to achieve these goals in this company? Or do you think that to satisfy them you may have to consider changing job?

Interviewee A, C and E appear to be happy and satisfied about their current job and intended to remain there more years, mainly because they feel that they're learning a lot and intend to learn more. Even one said “...*in the short term, I want to stay in the company, in the same position. I really like the environment and the people.*” (Interviewee C).

For these three employees, their companies put them at the center by giving them the tools to perform and to develop themselves.

Interviewee D also answered that she intends to stay in the company in the short run because her goals are aligned with the company's but did not show much excitement about staying in the long run. She said “*I would like to spend more time in the same area, even if it means staying for more than one year... In the long run, it's not an area where I imagine myself.*” (Interviewee D).

Interviewee B and F were more pessimistic, saying that soon they would want to leave the company. Interviewee B said she would just stay in the company to “...*acquire the*

maximum capabilities... because my expectation is to change job before the end of the year” and interviewee F said “I want to leave the company. I want to change area...”.

The next question was related to the company providing challenges that would allow them to grow as professionals. They were also asked about their connection with the strategic goals and values of the company.

Question 8: Do you feel that the company offers you challenges that allow you to grow professionally? Do you feel identified with the company's project and that the goals that the company intends are also the goals that you have set for yourself?

Except for one, most interviewees agreed that their companies provide them with challenges and opportunities for professional growth, one of the most motivated said *“Yes, the company provides challenges. In fact, this factor is one of the things that motivates me the most. The fact that they manage to challenge me and push me out of my comfort zone and propose different things every week.”* (Interviewee C). Only interviewee D said that it does not happen because the tasks are simple, *“...At the moment I don't feel the challenges because the tasks are simple, but I believe that in positions above, they exist.”*

About the connection with the company's goals, interviewee B said that she *“...does not identify with the company's goals and vision”*.

Interviewee A and F said they agreed in the principle with the theory on the company's strategic goals, but in practice, those things do not happen, claiming *“...on paper, I identify with it but what you hear is a thing but what happens is different...honestly, I think all companies are like that”* (Interviewee A). Interviewee C, D and E said that yes, they believed and connected a lot with the company's goals and values.

The next two questions were related to performance evaluation and monetary compensation. They were asked if there were any periodical performance evaluations and, if so if there were any compensation systems to reward the employees.

Question 9: Is there any periodic evaluation of your performance? How does it work? (What is the process, what is evaluated, what is the outcome, etc? What are the results of this performance evaluation used for?)

Question 10: Is there a compensation system in your company? How does it work? (Do you get any bonuses? Is there any status update?)

About question 9, most interviewees except for interviewee F claimed knowing the criteria and procedures used in their performance assessment. Interviewee E said that in her case “...weekly, there is a small evaluation” of her performance. Interviewee D said that her evaluation system “is divided into half-yearly cycles”. For interviewee C, the evaluation happens weekly as well in a form of One-To-One where he and his boss talk “about the past week and plan what will happen next...” and his boss “...gives a lot of feedback which helps align expectations and improve...”.

In case of interviewee B, the evaluation happens at the end of a project where “we have a conversation with our Team Leader to see what went well or not, to give feedback and identify points for improvement.”. In the case of interviewee A’s company, the evaluation “... is an annual performance review where everything is discussed, such as performance throughout the year...”.

Interviewee F said that supposedly the evaluation is annual “but they do nothing with the answers you give...”. She even didn’t know if promotion were related with those evaluations.

The next interviewee said that the performance system exists, pointing “...in theory the system works. Whenever we finish a project, we have a conversation with our Team Leader to see what went well or not, to give feedback and see points of improvement.” And she believed “that the results of this evaluation serve to make people think about what they have been doing and the results they have obtained...and it also serves as a basis in the case of promotions or similar.”. She concluded that the compensation system exists, but as she has been in the company for a few months, she did not receive any monetary compensation yet.

Regarding question 10, all interviewees explained that they know there’s a compensation system which means that there’s a policy of financial rewards to the employees. Interviewee A, B and E affirmed that they know it exists but don’t know more details

about it because they never received it, "... there is a compensation system, I never received it so I don't know what that award is based on but I know there is". (Interviewee E).

Interviewee D also confirmed that compensation system exists but didn't know any details. About the bonus, she wasn't sure "... if it's related to your productivity. I don't know if people are distinguished by performance or if everyone receives the bonus."

Question 11: How do you assess your company's retention? Is there a lot of turnover, or do people tend to stay in the company for many years? If people leave, why do you think that happens?

For this question, all interviewees claimed that the turnover is high but only interviewee A, B and F showed frustration about the topic claiming that "...when someone presents the letter of resignation, the speech of the administration is "okay, go away... we don't need you" and the truth is that in practice it's not quite like that and those who stay, suffer a lot from it" (Interviewee F). This clearly states that the company does not see the investment in employee well-being as a way to improve organizational performance.

Interviewee C, D and E confirmed that there is some turnover but it's mainly due to external facts such as the market or the salaries. Interviewee C said that "As I am in the IT department, the market is very active. There are people leaving and coming in, every month. This movement of people is constant, which derives a lot from the supply and demand of the market itself." One of the reasons he presents was related with the salary, saying that mostly "...people leave because of the salary." (Interviewee C). He also exposes that what his company pay is "... nowhere near or even comparable with what other companies pay..." (Interviewee C). Interviewee E also affirmed that "There is a great turnover. It happens due to the market and because in this area of consultancy, the market is always on the rise..."

Question 12: Do you consider that there is a great intensity of weekly tasks that often force you to work extra hours? If yes, do you consider that this factor can lead to exhaustion? And stress?

Regarding this question, both employees - interviewee C and E - said that there's not a massive number of weekly tasks that makes employees work extra hours. Interviewee C even added that in his company they "...have a culture of work life balance... There is great concern

on the part of the organization for people not to work extra time. When the clock reaches 6pm, everyone leaves...even his boss which sets the example". Interviewee E said that she "*does not think so*" that employees work extra hours. She agreed that there are very busy times but nothing too painful.

Interviewee D agreed that some people work extra hours, but it's related with the existence of positions "*...that require a very high level of responsibility and demand those extra hours*". She did not show any frustration about the topic.

Otherwise, for interviewee A, B and F the intensity of extra hours is painful for the employees. Interviewee F said that she didn't feel that pressure to do extra hours because she worked with a specific type of client that didn't demand that but she knew that in other teams, working extra time was a constant reality.

For interviewee A and as she is "*...working with very complex things but at the same time with a high level of detail... the stress to finish the tasks in 8h is real...*". It clearly frustrated and stressed her.

Interviewee B said that she has not lived a high-performance peak in the company yet but she knew from a colleague that "*...one person has worked 12 hours in a row...*". In this case, her perception of it was awful because even though she didn't experience herself, she is assuming that it will happen with her, leading her to a situation that is likely to affect her well-being.

Question 13: How do you rate the relationship between employees and their managers or supervisors? How would you define this relationship?

Question 14: Have you ever felt anxious when performing a task at work? Did that anxiety come from the task itself or from the company's pressure to achieve goals?

Regarding question 13, all but Interviewee F said that the relationship between employees and managers were more or less positive. Interviewee F said that, in general, the environment is positive but when the bosses are around "*...there is an atmosphere of tension, it seems that you can hardly speak....and well, it's kind of oppressive.*".

When asked about feeling anxiety when doing a task because of the pressure the company puts, Interviewee C said that *“Yes, especially those tasks that require more detail and working for top managers and important people...”* and Interviewee D, *“Of course, in a more stressful time of work, yes, I felt anxiety...that happened mainly in the busiest moments...”*. When asked about the reasons, it was never related about the company, but their own personalities involved, *“It was not pressure that I felt from the company, but the pressure that I put on myself...”*. (Interviewee C).

About feeling anxiety, interviewee D said that yes, she felt anxiety, informing that both situations happen, she *“have had situations where the anxiety came from the pressure I felt from the company and from the task itself because of a tight deadline or it was new and something she had never done before. The first ones leave you a bit nervous as well.”* (Interviewee D).

Interviewee A, B and F confirmed that they felt both situations or only the pressure from the company. Interviewee A claimed that *“Yes, I've felt both situations. I have felt pressure from the boss because the task was too complex and important, and I also felt anxiety only due to the complexity of the task and not from my boss.”*

In sum, it's possible to conclude that Interviewee A, B and F seem to live in a company that appears to adopt a conflicting outcomes perspective where their perception of the practices implemented show that HR does not perceive investment in employees' well-being as a way to achieve organizational performance. In contrast, interviewee C, D and E live in a context where there seems to have adopted a mutual gains perspective where it's clear that HR looks at well-being of the employees as an investment to achieve organizational performance and financial goals.

4.3. The role of investment on the development of soft skills

The goal of this section is to understand the role of soft skills and how do they relate to company's results and the workers' well-being. Besides, as the aim of this study, the goal is also to find if the soft skills can mitigate the negative effects of the conflicting outcomes perspective and in the case of mutual gains, understand if there is an effective investment in soft skills contributing to make it work.

The first question asked was related to what the interviewees' companies usually do to develop three particular soft skills: adaptability, communication, and time management.

Question 15: What does the company do to develop soft skills such as:

- a) The adaptability of employees? How?*
- b) Communication? How?*
- c) The time management of employees? How?*

Briefly, the results were the following:

Table 2: What do the interviewees' company do to develop the soft skills?

	Adaptability	Communication	Time management
Interviewee A	Nothing.	Nothing.	Nothing.
Interviewee B	Nothing.	Nothing.	Nothing.
Interviewee C	Some initiatives.	Some initiatives.	Some initiatives.
Interviewee D	Nothing.	Nothing.	Nothing.
Interviewee E	Some initiatives.	Some initiatives.	Some initiatives.
Interviewee F	Nothing.	Nothing.	Some initiatives.

About adaptability, “...the company puts employees in situations outside their comfort zone which results in obligating them to adapt to different contexts...” (Interviewee C). Besides this, the company develops adaptability through “...trainings that you receive to do a new job... So that you adapt as quickly as possible to that new task...”. (Interviewee E).

About developing communication skills, what the companies do is “... to bring people to talk to the company. We do presentations that develop communication skill. We also have several channels that allow this communication to happen, we have a social network, specific platform to communicate...we have different communication channels that facilitate communication.” (Interviewee C) and specific training about communication, for example, “We had a training recently on the topic: *Effective Communication...*” (Interviewee E).

Lastly, about time management skills, interviewee C said that to develop time management, his company give “...training about it when people enter in the company. The

company provides software that allow this time management to happen...”. Interviewee E said that her company develops time management “...through defining weekly goals, where we can guide ourselves to fulfill those tasks and not exceed our time too much...”.

Overall, the interviewees’ that work in companies that seem to adopt a conflicting outcomes perspective (Interviewee A, B and F) exposed that their companies don’t do anything to develop the three soft skills. Unlike Interviewee F that said that she received training about time management, even though she thought it was not adapted to their reality. Otherwise, notice that interviewees that work in companies that seem to adopt a mutual gains perspective are the ones that recognize more that their companies do try to develop the soft skills in analysis. Interviewee D is the exception, arguing that her company don’t particular do anything to develop adaptability, communication and time management.

4.3.1. In the conflicting outcomes perspective, can the development of soft skills mitigate some negative effects?

According to the analysis, the interviewees A, B and F work in companies that seem to adopt a conflicting outcomes perspective. This means that HR looks at employees’ well-being as a cost and not a way to achieve organizational performance. They do the minimum and the employees perceive that.

Therefore, the goal here is to understand, together with the interviewees, if their companies developed soft skills, if their perception of the practices would be different or if it might mitigate some of the negative aspects they pointed out above.

About **adaptability skills**, interviewees were asked “If your company developed adaptability in its active employees:

- Would people not leave the company for negative reasons? The toxic turnover would decrease?
- Would people be less anxious and less exhausted?
- The relationship between employees would be better?

To analyze their answers, let's look at the table above:

Table 3: Effects of developing adaptability to mitigate the negative effects of conflicting outcomes

	Turnover	Anxiety	Relationship among employees
Interviewee A	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
Interviewee B	Yes but not relevant.	Yes.	Yes.
Interviewee F	Yes but not relevant.	Yes.	No.

Interviewee A agreed that developing adaptability would mitigate the negative effects previously presented by her. Related with turnover she said that developing adaptability would have positive effects in toxic turnover “...because more adaptable people are able to better manage different situations...”. About anxiety, she pointed an important conclusion saying that if her company developed adaptability “...there would be more openness to say "I can't do this task" and then delegate to other people decreasing anxiety”.

Interviewee B and F agreed among each other saying that developing adaptability would have a positive effect on anxiety and the relationship among workers but not a relevant effect on the toxic turnover. For example, Interviewee B said that “...even if they invest more in developing adaptability... that won't be the critical factor for people to stay longer because, in fact, if people are more adaptable, they will also be adaptable in other companies...”.

About **communication skills**, interviewees were asked “If your company developed communication in its active employees”:

- Would people not leave the company for negative reasons? The toxic turnover would decrease?
- Would people be less anxious and less exhausted?
- The relationship between employees would be better?

To analyze their answers, let's look at the table above.

Table 4: Effects of developing communication to mitigate the negative effects of conflicting outcomes

	Turnover	Anxiety	Relationship among employees
Interviewee A	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
Interviewee B	No.	No.	Yes.
Interviewee F	Yes but not that relevant.	Yes	Yes.

Interviewee A agreed that develop communication skills in employees would have a positive effect in the negative context of a company that seems to adopt a conflicting outcomes perspective. She said that *“communication is very important when it comes to reducing the anxiety and stress felt by the employees and many other issues.”*

Interviewee B claimed that developing communication skills would not help reduce toxic turnover and anxiety because on the one hand, her *“work does not require a lot of communication, knowing how to speak...”* and *“it is not directly related to our tasks, it does not affect our work.”*

Lastly, interviewee F agreed that developing communication skills would help the stress and anxiety and improve the relationship among employees, saying *“...there are always things that are left unsaid or that are not said in the best way so if we could all communicate better it would always be good for people to be able to solve their problems...”*. About helping reduce the toxic turnover she said that developing communication skills *“does not have a direct connection with helping solving the issue.”*.

About **time management skills**, interviewees were asked “If your company developed time management in its active employees”:

- Would people not leave the company for negative reasons? The toxic turnover would decrease?
- Would people be less anxious and less exhausted?
- The relationship between employees would be better?

To analyze their answers, let’s look at the table above.

Table 5: Effects of developing time management to mitigate the negative effects of conflicting outcomes

	Turnover	Anxiety	Relationship among employees
Interviewee A	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
Interviewee B	Yes.	Yes	Yes.
Interviewee F	Yes.	Yes	Yes but not relevant.

Interviewee A, B and F agreed that time management would have a positive effect on reducing toxic turnover and anxiety “...because if we had the tools and skills to better manage our time, we would be much less exhausted, stressed, much less pressured and we would be able to perform our tasks better and do even more...” (Interviewee B).

Only Interviewee F seemed unsure about time management having a positive effect on improving the relationship among others, saying that “in a certain way, developing time management skills would help the relationship”.

4.3.2. In the mutual gains perspective, is there an actual investment in soft skills?

According to the analysis, the interviewees C, D and E work in companies that seem to adopt a mutual gains perspective. This means that HR believes that employees’ well-being is the best way for the company to achieve its organization performance. The HR department looks at employees’ well-being as an investment that will allow the company to improve its performance.

Therefore, the goal is to understand, together with the interviewees, if there is an actual investment in soft skills that consolidates the mutual gains perspective.

About **adaptability skills**, interviewees were asked “If your company developed adaptability in its active employees”:

- Would people not leave the company for negative reasons? The toxic turnover would decrease?
- Would people be less anxious and less exhausted?
- The relationship between employees would be better?

To analyze their answers, let's look at the table above:

Table 6: Effects of developing adaptability in the mutual gains perspective

	Turnover	Anxiety	Relationship among employees
Interviewee C	Yes.	Depends.	Yes.
Interviewee D	No.	Yes but not relevant	No.
Interviewee E	Yes but not relevant.	Yes but not relevant.	Yes.

Interviewee C agreed that developing adaptability would reduce toxic turnover and anxiety, saying that *“by ensuring adaptability, we manage to get people to do other things they normally don't do and only by being adaptable to different environments, makes people feel challenged. If people feel challenged, they feel motivated...”*. On the other hand, he thinks that the effect might be reverse when talking about the effect in the anxiety, claiming *“...if we are talking about more adaptable people, it means they left their comfort zone... when leaving that zone it can mean more moments of anxiety but that's part of growth and it's not a bad thing...being more adaptable generates moments of anxiety...”*.

Interviewee D does not think there's a direct connection with developing adaptability skills and turnover and the relationship among employees. Otherwise, about anxiety, she thinks *“...it can have a little more impact but more in the sense of you adapting to peaks of work...”*. Interviewee E only things that developing adaptability would have a clear effect on the relationship, saying *“...people already get along well, however if there is any conflict, it could help the level of collaboration between the collaborators...”*.

About **communication skills**, interviewees were asked “If your company developed communication skills in its active employees”:

- Would people not leave the company for negative reasons? The toxic turnover would decrease?
- Would people be less anxious and less exhausted?
- The relationship between employees would be better?

To analyze their answers, let's look at the table above:

Table 7: Effects of developing communication in the mutual gains perspective

	Turnover	Anxiety	Relationship among employees
Interviewee C	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
Interviewee D	Depends.	Yes but not relevant.	Yes.
Interviewee E	Yes.	Yes.	Yes but not relevant.

About developing communication skills to help reduce the toxic turnover, interviewee C and interviewee E agreed that it influences and retains talent, claiming “...*mainly, if we are talking about communication between employees, creating ways and moments for them to communicate... it would definitely retain talent...*” (Interviewee C). Interviewee D concluded that the effect depends if you’re in the beginning of your experience or not, because if you’re in the company for some years, the communication would not change that much your decision of leaving the company.

All three interviewees agreed that developing communication skills helps reducing the anxiety and tiredness of working extra hours. Interviewee C and E were sure that it influences the anxiety, because “*if the communication between the management and the HR department towards the employees was clear about career progression, salary information, at the level of rewards...it would help people dealing better with anxiety...*” (Interviewee E). Interviewee D claimed that the effect exists but it’s not relevant because the main point to solve the issue is to “...*reduce the amount of work. The communication already exists... they say, “we are all together” all the time but that is not the main point.*”

Lastly, about improving the relationship among employees, they all agree that developing communication skills improves the relationship, but interviewee E thinks it’s not that relevant, claiming “...*the more communication there is, the more comfortable people are among each other... it will always help. But it’s not the main point.*”

About **time management skills**, interviewees were asked “If your company developed time management in its active employees”:

- Would people not leave the company for negative reasons? The toxic turnover would decrease?

- Would people be less anxious and less exhausted?
- The relationship between employees would be better?

To analyze their answers, let's look at the table above:

Table 8: Effects of developing time management in the mutual gains perspective

	Turnover	Anxiety	Relationship among employees
Interviewee C	No.	Yes.	Yes.
Interviewee D	No.	Yes.	Yes.
Interviewee E	No.	Yes but not relevant.	Yes but not relevant.

About developing time management to reduce turnover, all interviewees agreed that it will not influence the decision of someone leaving the company. Interviewee D explained that *"... the problem is not in people not knowing how to manage their time, but in the overload of work. I think people know how to manage their time, they don't know why it's too much and how to handle it. And yet, they end up knowing because at the end of the day things get done...So, that's not the problem."*

As far as anxiety is concerned, they all agreed that developing time management skills helps reducing anxiety. Interviewee C explained that *"...if a person has moments of stress, it means that they are not managing their time well. If the company invests on developing this in the employee, it will have a positive effect. If the company invests on improving time management skills, it can reduce burnouts..."*

Lastly, about developing time management to improve the relationship among employees, they all agreed that it also positively influences. Interviewee D pointed that *"...by being more productive, people would have more time to relate to each other and that would improve the relationship among employees..."*

5. Conclusions

The study aimed at developing a better understanding of the perspectives of HRM about employees' well-being, mutual gains and conflicting outcomes and the role of developing soft skills on it.

In the past few years, the role of employee well-being has been acknowledged. For decades, HRM focused only on the financial results of the companies and never looked to employee well-being as an investment that would help the company achieve those goals. Otherwise, the mutual gains perspective looks at employee well-being as a way that allows the company to achieve financial performance and therefore, invests on it naturally.

Based on the data of this study, among six interviewees, three were working in companies that seem to adopt a mutual gains perspective and the other three were working in companies that seem to adopt a conflicting outcomes perspective. Therefore, it's possible to conclude that there is already some investment by the Portuguese companies in their employees' well-being, as half of the interviewees work in companies that seem to adopt a mutual gains perspective. It's important to note that, the three interviewees that work in companies that seem to adopt a conflicting outcomes perspective showed frustration and in the long run, they would probably leave their company.

The role of developing soft skills appear to contribute to mitigate some negative effects of the conflicting outcomes and maximize even more the positive effect of the mutual gains perspective.

This conclusion came from understanding that two out of the three that work in companies that seem to adopt a mutual gains perspective claimed that their companies take some initiatives to develop adaptability, communication and time management skills which might contribute to strengthen the mutual gains perspective. All the other three that work in companies that seem to adopt a conflicting outcomes perspective said that their companies don't do anything to develop such soft skills. A company that does not focus on developing soft skills in their employees could contribute for them to perceive their work environment as a conflicting outcomes perspective.

In the companies that seem to adopt the mutual gains perspective, communication and time management are the soft skills that would help more the companies to solve some internal issues, such as, constant and toxic turnover, anxiety and stress and the relationship among employees.

In contrast, the interviewees that work in companies that seem to adopt the conflicting outcomes perspective, agreed that developing adaptability and time management skills might mitigate the negative effects of less attention paid to employee well-being.

This study contributes to the literature and particularly to the practice of management, providing some evidence that an investment in soft skills can have a double effect: strengthen the positive effects of the mutual gains perspective and mitigate the negative effects of the conflicting outcomes perspective.

5.1. Limitations and future research

Despite the contributions pointed out above, it's important to point out some limitations that present some suggestions for further research.

First, and because we developed this study through a qualitative method, the sample was reduced, and the first identified limitation was that one. This represents that the findings cannot be generalized to the overall population.

Other limitation was that all interviewees work, in a way or another, in the management area and are from the same age group. It would be interesting to study different areas such as engineering or education or include interviewees from other age groups. About the soft skills, only three were studied to make the study more focused but it would be interesting to examine if the conclusions change as the soft skills are different.

For future research, a more detailed examination of the mutual gains and conflicting outcomes perspective would be a good starting point. First, the study could be started with a small questionnaire to map if the interviewees work in a conflicting outcomes perspective or mutual gains and only afterwards, the interview would be done. This way, the questions could be more directed to the perspective.

6. References

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7. Appendix

Appendix 1 – Interview Guide

INTRODUÇÃO

Esta entrevista acontece no âmbito da dissertação do mestrado em Gestão da Faculdade de Economia do Porto. Tem como principal objetivo perceber a relação existente entre as soft skills e o seu desenvolvimento aplicado à perspetiva de resultados conflitantes e de ganhos mútuos.

Esta entrevista será totalmente anónima e confidencial sendo que os seus resultados servirão apenas para contexto académico e para a escrita da dissertação em causa. Após conclusão da mesma, os mesmos serão eliminados.

1. Consente que esta entrevista seja gravada?

CONTEXTO

2. Em que empresa trabalha?
3. Há quanto tempo está na mesma?
4. Qual a sua posição?
5. Qual a sua job description?

ANÁLISE DAS PRÁTICAS

6. Tendo em conta a sua empresa, sente que existe uma alocação das tarefas às pessoas de forma detalhada? Por exemplo, a pessoa X tem mais experiência com Y e por isso faz Y? De que forma?
7. Sente que existe uma política de promoção? De que forma?
8. Sobre formação, sente que existe uma formação intensiva e especializada sobre as tarefas que mais tarde serão desenvolvidas pelo colaborador?
9. Sobre motivação, sente que a sua empresa a motiva? Com que tipo de recompensa é que a sua empresa a motiva?
10. Tendo em conta que um performance system é um processo de melhorar performance através da definição de objetivos individuais e de equipa que estão

alinhados com os objetivos estratégicos da empresa, sentes que existe um performance system na tua empresa? De que forma?

11. Existe alguma avaliação periódica à tua performance? De que forma? (qual o processo, o que é avaliado, qual o outcome, etc?)
12. Existe um sistema de compensação na tua empresa? Como funciona? (recebes algum bónus? Existe alguma atualização de status? Etc)
13. Como avalias a retenção da tua empresa? O que achas que leva a que a mesma exista?
14. Como avalias a relação entre liderado e quem lidera? De que forma definirias essa relação?
15. Sentes que existe alguma competição negativa entre os diversos colaboradores?

SOFT SKILLS

16. Sentes que se existisse um foco no desenvolvimento de soft skills, algumas coisas negativas que tu mencionaste anteriormente seriam minimizadas?
17. Se houvesse um plano de desenvolvimento de gestão de pessoas aplicado a quem gere pessoas na tua empresa, sentes que melhoraria? De que forma e que tipo de plano?
18. Como avalias a comunicação na tua empresa? Se isto fosse desenvolvido através de um plano, pensas que mudaria alguma coisa? O que?
19. Como avalias a tua gestão de tempo? A empresa ajuda-te de alguma forma a melhorares? Se não, como achas que poderia ajudar? E se isso acontecesse, achas que a tua perceção da empresa mudaria? Porquê?