




Green human resource management and Sustainable Development Goals in non-profit organisations

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Orientation: Conserving ecosystems including a culture that respects life in water and on land, aligned to the sustainable development goals (SDGs), could prevent future pandemics and natural hazards, but this cannot be achieved without establishments such as environmental non-profit organisations (NPOs) that operate across business and government sectors servicing the environment and vulnerable communities. Environmental NPOs could promote green Human Resource Management practices boosting scalable actions to achieve the SDGs.

Research purpose: The objective of this article is to explore the contemporary role and practices of Human Resources Management (HRM) within the NPO realm and the possible alignment and underwriting of the SDGs.

Motivation for the study: Non-profit organisations can be found to work across most, if not all, of the 17 United Nations' SDGs. The HRM function plays a significant role in contributing towards society's progress in achieving the SDGs with its focus on people management.

Research approach/design and method: This qualitative study applied an interpretivist philosophy with an inductive research approach, a case study strategy and multiple data collection techniques. Eleven cases were studied and limited to environmental South African NPOs selected purposively.

Main findings: Developing sustainable practices within the realm of HRM could augment non-profit organisational resilience by accentuating their work within the SDGs framework.

Practical/managerial implications: With a long-term view to sustainable HRM, including a view to greening HRM practices, practitioners can support their organisations with the achievement of the SDG targets.

Contribution/value-add: This study contributed to the academic literature on organisational resilience and could assist policymakers in the understudied South African NPO sector with HRM practices and alignment to the SDGs.

Keywords: human resource management; non-profit organisations; organisational resilience; sustainable development; leadership; innovation; non-profit resources; environmental non-profits.

Introduction

Orientation

The United Nations supports the enactment of the 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) through multi-stakeholder actions and the ability of non-profit organisations (NPOs) to contribute in these multi-layered partner relations is expected to be a standard prerequisite for gaining access to much-needed limited resources (Fowler, 2016). Non-profit organisations will need to convey a compelling value proposition regarding their objectives when participating in multi-partner relations (Maboya & McKay, 2019). In the framework of the SDGs, NPOs in South Africa function in diverse ways and have connections to and work in partnership with local and international agencies, regimes and businesses (Haywood et al., 2019).

Growth in NPO activity has occurred in a turbulent environment characterised by technological disruptions, an increase in natural and man-made hazards, a rise in non-traditional competitors, regulatory disorders and geopolitical upheavals (Lv et al., 2019; Reith, 2010; Scarce & Wang, 2020). The for-profit and non-profit segments have also been impacted by an increase in scandals exacerbated by social media where citizens demand transparency and more accountability (Omura & Forster, 2014; Visser, 2020).

Non-profit organisations play a valuable and beneficial role globally and their capability to ardently mitigate wide-ranging social and economic struggles is recorded at length (Zulkhibri, 2014). Furthermore, NPOs regularly operate across several, or probably all, of the 17 SDGs (Fowler, 2016). In South Africa, NPOs experience difficulties in pursuing their missions resulting from declining regime support, rapid formation of new NPOs, and several companies that directly also serve communities traditionally deemed NPO territory (Dobrai & Farkas, 2016; Mohammed, 2017). Thus, to remain effective and continue to deliver on their missions, NPOs now need to compete for scarce funding and other key resources such as talented people, visionary leaders and volunteers who serve as board members, as well as the operational level. Considering the central role and contribution of the NPO sector to the SDGs, it is important to explore how these institutions are structured and operated, to promote and understand its value-add. From this context, this study adopts the broad organisational resilience construct lens to explore the practices of human resource management (HRM).

According to Duchek (2020, p. 220) 'organizational resilience is an organization's ability to anticipate potential threats, to cope effectively with adverse events, and to adapt to changing conditions'. A key characteristic of a resilient organisation is its adaptive capacity or capability to adapt and these may be considered as a set of resources and the effective use of such resources (Lundberg & Johansson, 2015).

Several SDGs are pertinent to HRM specialists, 'such as the goals for decent work and economic growth, gender equality, good health and well-being, reducing inequalities and developing partnerships for the achievement of these goals' Kramar (2022, p. 147). Additionally, the work of environmental NPOs would naturally underwrite the SDGs in relation to SDGs concerned with environmental well-being such as climate action, life below water and life on land or SDG 13 to SDG 15. Embracing HRM tactics and procedures that underwrite the achievement of monetary, social and environmental goals, considering the internal and external bearing of an organisation in the long-term, while coping with unexpected changes and its impact is linked to the key concepts of organisational resilience and SDG 17 that relates to partnerships to achieve the goals (Aust et al., 2024).

Research purpose and objectives

Ongoing environmental degradation will cause an increase in natural hazards such as droughts and flooding resulting from climate change (Naidoo & Fisher, 2020). The conservation efforts required to meet SDGs 13, 14, 15 and 17 could avoid future pandemics and is not achievable NPOs focusing on the environmental sector (Nemţeanu & Dabija, 2020; Ng, 2020; O'Connell, 2020).

Non-profit organisations occupy a central position in delivering on the SDGs and other global environmental and social commitments to which South Africa has prescribed and such time-sensitive targets may incur setbacks or not be

achieved at all (Naidoo & Fisher, 2020). Considering some of South Africa's shortcomings, such as inadequate communication, a lack of trust and leadership deficiencies, opportunities for mediation and innovation supporting the development of various sectors and stakeholders working towards a shared purpose may be lost because of NPO existential concerns (Holtzhausen, 2014; Meiring et al., 2018; Thompson & Wissink, 2018).

This research delved into the adaptive capacities NPOs need to build organisational resilience to sustain themselves and deliver on their organisational mission from an HRM perspective, within environmental South African NPOs. In essence, the organisational resilience construct is broad and the study discussed three high-level aspects categorised as: People, Planning and Practices. However, this article explored only the broad adaptive capacity categorised as people focusing on HRM practices, its contribution and possible alignment to the SDGs.

Literature review

Organisational resilience: Planning, redundancy, recoverability and adaptability

As a result of the fuzzy nature of the organisational resilience construct, there are often interconnected lenses through which the subject is viewed, and the application of these concepts is dependent on the context in which they are framed (Duchek, 2020). It was found that each of these concepts frequently refers to resources, which could be the efficient allocation, use or lack of resources and instances of these are included in the following expansion of these concepts.

The central focus of the majority of organisational resilience studies has been on containing a crisis and the planning or anticipation factors include circumventing unexpected events as well as exertions to stop the progress of adverse events (Andersson et al., 2019). Tactical planning is worthwhile when expecting potential disturbances to recognise vulnerabilities both from an internal and external organisational perspective; however, entities regularly experience challenges with effective planning or anticipation because of resource constraints (Branicki et al., 2017).

Redundancy tactics include options for day-to-day operations. Initially, some setbacks in resources and performance may be experienced before alternate arrangements become operational and performance is restored to adequate levels (Gibson & Tarrant, 2010). Dependency on a reactionary stance to a crisis is not ideal; robust implementable resilience plans including redundancy of resources are optimal (Bryce et al., 2022).

Recoverability stems from the efficient reorganisation of resources and the gathering of organisational capacities including flexibility and adaptableness to its market (Shepherd & Williams, 2023). Adaptation involves building adaptive capacity and, in so doing, augmenting the ability of

organisations to respond to changes while applying decisions related to adaptation (Brooks & Adger, 2005). Focusing on the adaptive capacities of NPOs is deemed important in a resource-constrained non-profit sector. This study adopted an active perspective on organisational resilience, as highlighted by Saad et al. (2021), in which NPOs' adaptive capacities were identified and their efficient use and allocation enabled NPOs to adapt to environmental turbulence, rather than a passive view where the NPO simply returned to its previous state.

Effective human resource administration is centred on the specific learnings of staff that make up an entity. Subsequently, the capacity of the entire entity to inspire learning and the construction of new knowledge is shaped by the human resource system (Alerasoul et al., 2021). Measures undertaken to augment organisational resilience are dependent on the discernment of the situation by managers (McCann et al., 2009). For example, if managers notice a threat from disturbances such as increased competitive behaviour, they take steps to deter this (Hillmann & Guenther, 2021).

Non-profit and for-profit interconnectedness

Worldwide an NPO is generally considered to be a legal entity and is not primarily operated to make or dispense profits. Furthermore, NPOs are not a part of the government, and assets cannot be dispersed except for its non-profit cause (Irish et al., 2004; Zulkhibri, 2014). Non-profit organisations do not normally have a bottom line, however occasionally where a profit is realised, it is re-invested in the achievement of its mission (Weerawardena et al., 2010). The business sector aims to maximise profit for its stockholders and contemporary practices have promoted the interests of other stakeholders in the corporate world (Weerawardena et al., 2010). Corporate growth is largely because of technological development, training prospects, research and expansion activities affecting the quality of human and relational capital factors (Bontis et al., 2018).

The tactical resource-based view values organisational interconnectedness, accentuating the necessity for entities to unite on complex challenges, such as the SDGs, where collaboration is valued (Moldavanova & Goerdel, 2018). Non-profit organisations and corporates both benefit from effective organisational traits such as teamwork, culture, leadership and resource management (Pinho et al., 2014). Efficient management of financial resources is vital to the performance of corporates and is similarly important for NPOs (Su et al., 2014).

However, instead of increasing shareholder wealth, an NPO's prime objective is to achieve its charitable mission, benefiting several stakeholders (Finkler et al., 2018). Non-profit organisation sources of financing are limited compared to corporates as NPOs are incapable of issuing equity stocks. Thus, net assets are valued by NPOs as a stream of internal funding (Calabrese, 2012). Focusing on increasing NPO income is only advantageous if assets are also amassed (Prentice, 2015).

According to Meyer and Xin (2018), in the corporate world, strategic objectives can only be achieved if they can entice, hold on to and develop extremely skilled people to execute their plans. In the for-profit world, competent staff are considered to be a competitive advantage and are key to ensuring lucrative strategies underwriting the creation of wealth (Meyer & Xin, 2018).

Multinational firms entering local markets often seek out NPOs as a means of strategically working with local communities to leverage their unique knowledge, legitimacy with potential consumers, civil society actors and access to local sourcing and distribution practices (Barroso-Méndez et al., 2020; Eid & Sabella, 2014). Corporate and NPO alliances should comprise additional types of resources that assist both entities to nurture richer information exchanges and facilitate stronger bonds, moving away from the traditional stance of simply financing operations (Sanzo et al., 2015).

Non-profit organisations directors are tasked with acquiring resources and ensuring transparency for complicated relationships with their board members, funders, local communities and other stakeholders while striving towards its mission (Worth, 2020). While there may be differences in the way that NPOs and corporates operate, they both have a vested interest in society's well-being. Non-profit organisations are key stakeholders to corporates and vice versa for NPOs. A recent study into the motives for NPO and corporate collaborations found that NPOs and corporate managers are firmly motivated to participate in partnerships from the moral motive of resolving a societal or environmental matters (Spitz et al., 2021).

Volunteers form a critical resource to NPOs and are often sourced from the for-profit sector. Non-profit organisations have a unique challenge in the sense that they need to manage both their employees and their volunteers from a sustainable human resources perspective. The for-profit sector, on the other hand, may view the volunteering efforts of their employees as a means to bolster their firm image and accordingly report on their societal efforts from an SDG perspective (Chen & Wu, 2022). Thus, the effective management of these human resources becomes a strategic requirement of the environmental NPOs.

Human resource management and the sustainable development goals

Human resource management largely seeks to manage individuals strategically including a collaborative stakeholder approach (Stankevičiūtė & Savanevičienė, 2018). Some relationships between certain SDGs and HRM may be obvious, for instance, ending poverty and reducing inequalities, ensuring gender equality and providing decent work, all resonate with contemporary HRM studies on remuneration systems and employee well-being. However, the HRM role is viewed in many entities as solely administrative and accordingly not accountable for any of the SDG concerns (Dundon & Rafferty, 2018; Polacko, 2021).

Conversely, in other entities where the workforce is the dominant sole element of operating costs HRM, is seen as a fundamental contributor to the bottom line but leaves little space for exploring sustainable HRM practices. Significant developments are therefore necessary in areas such as remuneration policies focused on decreasing inequality; performance evaluations focused on achieving the prerequisites of numerous stakeholders and relevant training focused on environmental aspects and concerns (Brewster & Brookes, 2024; Evans et al., 2023).

Considering the increasing urgencies resulting from climate change and environmental degradation, a recent focus on 'Green Human Resource Management' (GHRM) has gained momentum from an academic perspective in the last decade. Green human resource management is the use of HRM strategies to include a greening attribute to practical aspects such as staff recruitment, employee training, performance evaluations and staff incentives (Ren et al., 2022; Zubair & Khan, 2019). There are several recent additions to the HRM academic sphere, and to move closer to the SDG targets, people in various entities will be required to behave differently, consequently impacting HRM in multiple ways. However, it is evident that this is not occurring at a substantial rate or scale, hence meeting the SDG targets by 2030 is unlikely and will most probably fall short for several years (Scharlemann et al., 2020).

Green human resource management may be able to boost the rate and scale necessary to achieve the SDGs. Environmental NPOs can play a central role to the greening HRM practices of the mainstream corporate world. For example, environmental NPO leadership and employees can organically influence business leaders to underwrite their entities' contributions towards social responsibilities. Furthermore, SDGs concerned with environmental well-being such as climate action, life below water and life on land or SDGs 13–15 are naturally aligned to the work of environmental NPOs.

Human resources of non-profit organisations

Non-profit organisation underwriting of human resources is below standard in comparison to other segments; however, the outcomes concerning staff performance are encouraging and significant for the realisation of NPO missions (Ariza-Montes & Lucia-Casademunt, 2016). Non-profit organisation human resources are considered a key stakeholder, they focus on adding value to the NPO, thereby necessitating their upkeep and management. Codes of ethics and social responsibility are often implemented in the human resource realm to achieve good governance of an entity; however, staff can equally affect the principles of good governance. The capability to attract and administer volunteers within the parameters of HRM is critical to an NPO's resilience (Crotty & Ljubownikow, 2020; Oliveira et al., 2021).

Similar to the for-profit sector, NPOs have established a resource management style grounded on the personal links

of NPO leaders (Batjargal et al., 2013). These connections are used to source and retain volunteers, reducing uncertainty present in environments where volunteering is considered ambivalent (Batjargal et al., 2013; Crotty & Ljubownikow, 2020). According to Crotty and Ljubownikow (2020), this subsequently results in compromised durability and quality of volunteers because of the restricted network reach.

An employee's aptitude for organisational resilience is an individual's belief in their ability to execute activities with expertise and understanding when performing to the specifications required in turbulent conditions (Kim, 2021). Efficacy, which refers to the employee's belief that their employer can deal with a turbulent situation, is a crucial dimension of resilience (Kim, 2021). Trijp et al. (2018) found that organisational resilience is enriched by a composite and varied network in which an entity exists and is stimulated by adaptive learning. A key element of adaptive capacity is the ability to learn and advance new understandings that are essential for organisations to continue dynamically and remain functional, or else, systems could become static, overlooking internal capital (Allen & Holling, 2010). The capability to recruit and administer volunteers within the parameters of its functional environment is critical to an NPOs success (Oliveira et al., 2021). Non-profit organisations rely on volunteers who work both at the board level e.g. trustees and at the operative rank e.g. administering daily task, consequently, managing unpaid workers at different levels have their own challenges. There, therefore, exists a complicated yet fundamental relationship between the staff of an NPO and the volunteers who work across different levels of the NPO (Sneath, 2021).

Research design

Research approach

Strategic management models such as the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis or adopted from the commercial world are commonly used to forecast the demise of NPOs; however, the strategies used to continue providing its programmatic social objectives are regularly descriptive and contextually determined, suggesting that the numbers are only one part of the dilemma (Finkler et al., 2018; Searing et al., 2021). Therefore, qualitative research related to organisational resilience is required and may be considerably more effort intensive. Furthermore, the pursuit of organisational resilience approaches is unavoidably prescriptive, which is not necessarily the point of reference from an NPO management literature perspective; the study of organisational resilience necessitates a systemic tactic that is multifaceted and qualitatively positioned (Searing et al., 2021).

Research strategy

The study's strategy was the use of multiple case studies. The case study method is a prevalent research technique, which is most interesting for practical subjects because developments,

difficulties and applications can be researched to produce understandings that could enhance practice (Ponelis, 2015).

Research method

The study's methodology was guided by the research onion model developed by Saunders et al. (2009). This qualitative study applied an interpretivist viewpoint with an inductive study approach, a case study strategy, with various data collection practices. An interpretivism epistemological viewpoint was applied to acquire a deep sense of social understanding by examining the participants' mindsets towards developing organisational resilience.

Older research areas accruing large volumes of literature that underwrite the definitions of academic frameworks and theories are more pertinent to deduction. Whereas, with newer research areas and less accessible literature, working inductively – reflecting on theoretic themes resulting from the gathered data – is more applicable (Saunders et al., 2009; Sheppard, 2020). Organisational resilience theory is considered a newer research area, still in the emerging phase and working inductively was appropriate for the study (Chen et al., 2021; Ma et al., 2018).

Using a single case study enables the academic to question older theoretical associations and investigate possible new relationships as a thorough study is undertaken and enables the academic to develop a deeper comprehension of the study's participants (Gustafsson, 2017; Yin, 2011). However, supporting information from a small number of 'multiple cases is often considered more compelling, and the overall study is therefore regarded as being more robust' (Yin, 2009, p. 53). To obtain compelling findings for the study and enable cross-case analysis, multiple case studies were chosen (Ponelis, 2015).

In purposive sampling, the researcher determines what needs to be studied and proceeds to find individuals who, because of their knowledge, expertise or experience, are willing to and can make information available (Etikan et al., 2016). A small sample could comprise cases that are entirely different; however, patterns and themes that arise are expected to be of specific interest and worth, denoting significant themes and also allowing an opportunity to document distinctiveness (Etikan et al., 2016; Ponelis, 2015). Information for each case studied, such as the number of years in operation, location, staff count, funds raised and number of board participants, etc., enabled cross-case analysis. Non-profit organisations 5 years and older were included and large international NPOs operating within South Africa were excluded. Only local NPOs operating in South Africa were considered. Eleven locally established environmental NPO cases were studied and selected purposively, and the executive leaders were interviewed in each case.

Research setting

All interviews were recorded and completed via Zoom from April 2022 to July 2022 in South Africa. The 11 participants

were based in the Eastern Cape, Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal provinces in South Africa; the author was based in KwaZulu-Natal.

Entrée and establishing researcher roles

The research philosophy adopted in this research was an interpretivist or constructivist philosophy. A key factor is that the researcher relies on the assessments and opinions of the participants in the study, and the researcher interprets their experiences to generate numerous meanings and develop a theory from these interpretations. This study followed a similar process: executives, chief executive officers (CEOs) and NPO leaders provided information that was collected during a semi-structured interview and interpreted to develop a theory. This study was based on occurrences that are ingrained in lived work experiences. As a result of the analyses of the participants in the practices of adaptive capacities and organisational resilience, understanding was socially constructed.

The interpretivist philosophy perceives the social domain of commerce and management science as multifaceted and because of its complexity, studies into business management from a social perspective will be diluted if such complexity is condensed to law-like generalities. The interpretivist philosophy advances information and knowledge by concentrating on an idiosyncratic and descriptive method when complexities exist (Al-Ababneh, 2020). This study focused on the management sciences i.e. organisational resilience of environmental NPOs, which is people centric, multifaceted, possibly more so than the corporate space and positioned in the world of social science. Furthermore, knowledge was generated from the viewpoints of individuals, such as NPO leaders following a descriptive process; therefore, an interpretivist philosophy was deemed appropriate.

Research participants and sampling methods

Non-profit organisations founders or executives who were willing to participate in the study both from an individual and an organisational basis were purposively selected using a heterogeneous sampling strategy. Access to at least one leader in the NPO was required to conduct the case study. A total of 11 environmental NPOs were purposively selected and the NPO executive or founder of each NPO was interviewed. The 11 NPOs purposively selected formed the study sample.

Data collection methods

Primary data were collated through semi-structured interviews with the NPO leaders of each case study that included open-ended questions. Distinctive codes were allocated to the 11 cases and the individual NPO leaders to analyse data and uphold confidentiality. The NVivo version 12 tool was utilised for data analysis.

Academics conducting qualitative studies often employ a thematic analysis technique involving the documentation of

frequently occurring patterns determined from datasets (Lochmiller, 2021). The thematic process implemented for the study followed an *a priori* situation, whereby the interview questions were linked to the theoretical frameworks underpinning the study and coded in advance of the primary data collection. The thematic analysis generated a rich data set, and the participants' responses were presented within each of the 18 themes identified for the People, Planning and Practices categories. However, for this article, only 8 themes were included, focusing on the People category.

Data recording

After the interviews were completed, the process of transcribing the interviews began. The recorded interviews were downloaded from Zoom and transcribed using the Office 365 Word transcription function.

Strategies employed to ensure data quality and integrity

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, participants were sent a summary of the interview record via email requesting their review and feedback. To further support the dependability and credibility of the study, recordings of the interview were also made available to participants to clarify their notes. The interview records and transcriptions were accepted as final when no feedback was received after direct follow-ups with the participants.

The findings from this study were not generalisable but rather transferable and relevant to unique NPO case situations. To ensure the credibility of the findings from the study, a summary of the findings was shared with participants and feedback was requested to ensure the credibility of the study. One participant responded timeously and agreed with the findings and supported the adaptive capacity framework developed. A cross-case analysis was undertaken to further reflect on the data collated and to add to the richness of the findings.

Data analysis

Each interview question was coded beforehand and analysed to detect trends and cross-examine data in multiple ways via NVivo's search engine and enquiry functionality, following a thematic analysis process consistent with qualitative studies. Data gathered from the semi-structured interviews and the

review of organisational reports and online or website information facilitated cross-case analysis. This information was sourced directly from the participants and NPO websites or official reports such as annual financial statements and annual review documents.

Reporting style

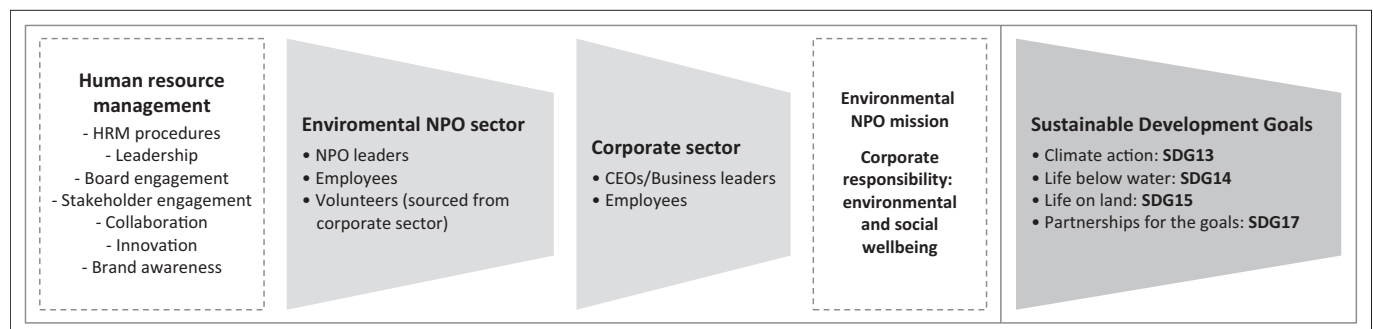
The reporting style adopted in this research is the American Psychological Association Style 6th edition.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee of the Graduate School of Business and Leadership of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, with reference number: HSSREC/00003782/2022. This research was exempt from any human or organisational participation.

Results

Figure 1 is a diagrammatic presentation of the relations linking the NPO sector's human resources namely: employees, volunteers (regularly sourced from the business sector) and NPO leaders. The business sector's human resources are employees and business leaders or CEO's. The leaders of the NPO sector and the leaders of the business sector influence each other to achieve their interconnected missions to protect and conserve the environment. Consequently, the human resources available to environmental NPOs are significantly diverse and complex compared to the corporate world. Thus, the HRM function of environmental NPOs plays a significant role in contributing to society's progress in achieving the SDGs with a focus on people management, including the aspects of leadership, HRM procedures, board engagement, collaboration, stakeholder engagement and brand awareness. Environmental NPO HRM practitioners are uniquely positioned and could influence and enhance the achievement of SDG 13, SDG 14 and SDG 15. This also underwrites the significant role that HRM practitioners within NPOs can play towards SDG 17, which emphasises the need for partnerships and collaboration to revitalise the global sustainable development agenda and promote transparency and accountability towards their stakeholders.



HRM, human resource management; NPO, non-profit organisation; CEO, chief executive officer; SDG, Sustainable Development Goal.

FIGURE 1: Environmental non-profit organisation human resource management underwriting environmental sustainable development goals.

Outline of the results

This article explored only the broad adaptive capacity categorised as People focusing on HRM practices, its contribution and possible alignment to the SDGs. This article excluded the remaining two themes identified in the study, namely Planning and Practices. The eight themes discussed next are therefore the sub-themes included within this limited context of the study.

Human resources management procedures

Human resource management procedures could align employees and volunteers to the long-term endurance of the entity. This is possible when human resource principles are matched with desired staff contributions for organisational resilience to formulate the entity's human resource policies (Andersson et al., 2019). In this way, the NPO's human resource policies become a regulating control to align volunteers and employees to organisational resilience (Andersson et al., 2019). The amalgamation of skills with intellectual, social and contextual practices from an organisational perspective enhances organisational resilience. Likewise, the mixture of individual traits, methodically developed and incorporated into an entity's human resources approach, also promotes organisational resilience (Beuren et al., 2020).

According to Malinen and Harju (2017), volunteers who feel supported are more likely to show improved levels of commitment to the NPO's cause. It is therefore imperative that human resources policies and procedures of NPOs consider the well-being and support of both their employees and volunteers (Crotty & Ljubownikow, 2020; Lee, 2016; Steele et al., 2017).

Leadership

Non-profit organisations leadership quality and expertise can influence the prospects of communities (Howieson & Hodges, 2014). Environmental NPO leaders are also tasked with building a culture of shared responsibility towards the environment, encouraging corporate and government stakeholders to collaborate effectively (Sneath, 2021). Furthermore, an evolving culture of shared leadership in NPOs requires broad engagement and participation in dialogues about leadership and requires the promotion of trust across all levels (Routhieaux, 2015).

The general theme across the leadership attributes explored was the ability to empower and motivate staff for improved decision-making, thereby promoting accountability between the different levels of the NPO and uniting staff under a common purpose. The most cited leadership value among the participants was trust. Trust can be lost quickly and needs to be formed or rebuilt in deliberate and systematic steps. Leading teams from a culture of mistrust require the creation of opportunities for teamwork and collaboration and rely on vigilant and constant execution and reiteration (Cilliers &

Greyvenstein, 2012; De Waal et al., 2019; Gardner, 2016; Pittinsky, 2010)

Gibson and Tarrant's (2010) resilience triangle model depicts leadership, people and knowledge as competences that are all equally crucial to organisational resilience. A cogency-based leadership approach underwrites aspects of being convincing, clear and logical while enabling a flexible approach between various leadership styles.

Governance challenges

Challenges related to NPO governance include the board's interference with the executive's role, which increases executive stress levels and results in burnout, undermining the leader's performance and consequently the NPO's as well (Olinske & Hellman, 2017). Certain experiments found that the board frequently has misgivings about an NPO leader's capacity to fulfil the essential requisites of performing activities because of the board's self-confidence in its governance skills (Bernstein et al., 2016).

A further challenge to implementing good governance is that a board member often plays dual roles on the board committee because of the lack of appropriate skills, which is not ideal for the prevention of unethical practices; the actual efficiency of the board may be questioned (Murray, 2019; Van Zyl & Mans-Kemp, 2020; Wells, 2012). A practical challenge for NPOs is the facilitation of upskilling board members, which may be complex considering constrained resources. This subsequently results in a conflicting scenario between the demand for expertise and stakeholder representation on board committees (Chelliah et al., 2016; Murray, 2019; Wells, 2012). Furthermore, according to Murray and Thomas (2019), where training was provided, the board members often cited a lack of time and other commitments, further compounding the negative impact of unskilled members who contribute the time of goodwill but do not have the skills necessary to fulfil their responsibilities.

Board engagement

The behaviour of both an NPO board and the executive leader regularly underwrites uncertainties, confusion and conflict and is justified by the recurrent lack of role elucidation (Bernstein et al., 2016). The general thread across the analysis of the participants' responses is the ability to empower and motivate staff for improved decision-making, thereby promoting accountability between the different levels of the NPO and uniting staff for a common purpose. Furthermore, several NPO leaders also demonstrated alertness to their environments and were often focused on the big picture. Gibson and Tarrant's (2010) resilience triangle model depicts leadership, people and knowledge as competences, which are all equally crucial to organisational resilience. It was found that the leaders studied displayed the crucial competencies necessary to navigate a turbulent environment and promote organisational resilience.

Pryce (2021) recognises that the human rudiments of an entity, e.g. leadership, staff inspiration governance etc., are indispensable as material resources and are key to enacting organisational resilience. While board members are also considered volunteers, they influence the mission and vision of the NPO and impact the culture of the NPO as well. The resource dependence theory (RDT) and the organisational resilience theories emphasise the role of board members who underwrite the governance of the NPO and provide legitimacy for the NPO. It was found that apart from their fundraising skills, board members still possessed other important competencies that they contributed to the NPO.

Furthermore, it was concluded that the cultural fit of board members to an NPO is also important as the expectations of the NPO leaders for fundraising abilities may be unmet if not explicitly required. However, as the literature points out, this subject is understudied. Therefore, this is aligned with the findings in the literature reviewed, as when the most capable board members are appointed, these competences impact NPOs positively, underwriting NPO synergy (Roshayani et al., 2018). Therefore, competent board members are deemed adaptive capacities of an NPO that can shield an NPO from adversity during turbulent conditions.

Collaboration challenges

Sustaining good collaboration necessitates investments in time and resources (Zeimers et al., 2019). Participant 10 believed collaboration to be integral to NPOs and thought of it as a global trend. In the absence of collaboration, Participant 10 believed that powerful opportunities might be lost by working in a silo or one's own little niche and stressed the importance of investing time and other resources early on to ensure a successful and well-aligned collaborative partnership. While most participants cited pitfalls related to collaboration, several also found the need to find workable solutions to effective collaboration – also indicated in the literature review.

Further downsides related to collaboration with other NPOs identified in the participant responses were a lack of trust and a desire to protect and promote only their individual NPO interests rather than working towards the greater good or their common causes. Examples of these pitfalls were mentioned by Participant 1, Participant 3, Participant 6 and Participant 9. A strong correlation to competition for limited funding is also evident.

Participant 10 indicated that selecting the right partners with whom to collaborate was vital and also suggested that collaborating with NPOs to fill a gap that they had from an overall programme or project basis might be most beneficial. This was suggested to alleviate the competition factor in collaborative instances where NPOs do the same work as other NPOs. Participant 2 described a situation in which competition between different departments in their NPO developed into silos. Participant 2 further described how the lack of collaboration between the different silos had a negative impact on the organisation.

Participant 2 acknowledged that the creation of silos had been a pitfall in achieving effective internal collaboration within the NPO. There is a need for individuals from multiple disciplines to combine their expertise to address issues from an organisational resilience perspective (De Waal et al., 2019; Gardner, 2016).

Non-profit organisations will be required to articulate a convincing value proposition in relation to their mission coherently when engaging in multipartner relationships (Maboya & McKay, 2019). Partnering with NPOs is a conduit for corporates to achieve their social accountability goals, simultaneously assisting NPOs to fulfil their missions (Eid & Sabella, 2014). The corporate sector in general is a key stakeholder that several NPOs rely on for funding.

Stakeholder engagement and collaboration

One of the key enablers of the transformation and adaptability of NPOs is the availability and ability to access and use resources (Mutongwizo, 2018). Participants 1-6 mentioned that the lack of collaboration between NPOs was the most lacking element that required improvement in the NPO sector. Collaboration could lead to improved financial resources for this sector in general. The access to and sharing of resources mentioned by Participant 4 and Participant 6 alluded to the findings of the literature reviewed where, according to Kraaijenbrink et al. (2010), the Resource Based View (RBV) theory insufficiently acknowledges the importance of combining resources.

However, as Participant 2 continued to explain, there was also value in this process as eventually, it assisted the NPO to clarify its role in contributing to a joint cause and also identify its unique offering in collaborative partnerships. It was also found that internal collaboration is necessary to alleviate silos within organisations and an example of this was found in Case 2, where it was necessary to manage internal stakeholders. Therefore, it was found that HRM is influential in reducing silos and promoting teamwork to achieve broader environmental objectives.

It was found that there is value in the collaborative process as, eventually, it can assist the NPO to clarify its role in contributing to a joint cause and also identify its unique offering in collaborative partnerships, which include a variety of external stakeholders. This aligns with the finding that obtaining knowledge via collaboration enables operative partnerships to develop, which results in an enhanced organisational capability (Urban & Gaffurini, 2017).

Furthermore, it was found that high competition seems to be a negative factor affecting effective collaboration between the NPOs as clearly described by Participant 1, Participant 6 and Participant 9. Yet once again, in Case 5, they determined how to collaborate effectively; Case 5 is 7 years old and Cases 1, 6 and 9 are 7, 10 and 22 years old, respectively. Thus, it seems that the age of the NPO to unlock effective collaboration is not a factor. Several cases, however, recognised the need for

collaboration between the environmental NPOs as the long-term external collaborative efforts yield improved results for the sector's broader environmental and SDG goals.

An innovation outlook

The majority of the participants' responses referred to examples of the types of activities that they undertake to encourage creativity and innovation in their teams. Participant 4 mentioned that sometimes her own home was used to host her team. Participant 3 also mentioned that her team stayed at her home to limit costs and fondly described the time they spent together. This engagement in activities with their teams was related strongly to the discoveries from the literature reviewed in that employees play a key role in promoting innovation as an organisational tenet.

Participant 8 reflected on the inclusivity of staff from different parts of the NPO engaging in dialogue to find solutions. The resultant diversity of thought was valued by Participant 8 and is aligned with the literature review findings in that staff should participate at all levels.

The account of Participant 10 describing his experiences with creativity from different perspectives is important as it alludes to the limitations of staff and that being aware of this is important to assist staff with developing creativity. It also alludes to the insights of leaders who need to know when to step back and let their teams be unencumbered to realise innovation. Therefore, while innovation by employees could become an appropriate strategy to use to overcome adversity (Senbeto & Hon, 2020), this would need to be tempered by the limitations of staff and the leader's awareness of such limitations.

The insights of Participant 10 were valuable and revealed the deep connection of an NPO's inner attributes such as inspiring leaders and a work environment that is conducive to innovation. Cultures that boost communication and propagate experimentation and support instead of blame, promote innovation and Participant 1 recognised that a shortfall was present within their NPO. Therefore, building resilience in multifaceted systems requires strengthening the culture of innovation, and this is possible when diversity is valued, and bricolage is employed by NPO leaders. Consequently, this may manifest in enhanced decision-making and solving of dilemmas (Singh et al., 2023).

Another finding was the key need for diversity attribute, mentioned by Participant 8, while Participant 3 and Participant 4 engaged in bricolage with the use of their own homes for team activities. Therefore, it was found that most of the NPO cases studied have implemented important elements of innovation or are at least aware of their shortcoming concerning innovation and are well positioned to utilise innovation in an adaptive capacity.

Brand awareness

For NPOs, social media presents benefits such as minimal cost, enabling dialogic communication and boosting engagements,

all resulting in increased brand awareness (Belenioti & Vassiliadis, 2017; Nah & Saxton, 2013). During a crisis, a decent business reputation is perceived as an elusive asset, serving as a safeguard to diminish institutional harm (Kim & Woo, 2019). An NPO's brand reputation is also considered an asset, with the additional advantages of NPO resource influence and surviving adversities (Lefroy & Tsarenko, 2013).

Social investments undertaken by corporates are promoted via CRM and underwrite the legitimacy and profitability of the entity (Liu & Ko, 2011). Consumers who have a strong brand affinity with a business brand can have this affinity transferred to an NPO brand when an alliance is formed to meet social goals (Vafeiadis et al., 2021). Vafeiadis et al. (2021) expand on the framework developed by Michel and Rieunier (2012). Subsequently, Vafeiadis et al. (2021) propose that NPOs should focus on consumers who strongly connect with a business brand, particularly when the business is well suited to the NPO mission and has its own strong reputation.

In this space, HRM is central to recruiting staff and volunteers who buy into the brand of the environmental NPOs, which could boldly promote their commitment to the SDGs. Furthermore, HRM could also contribute to training ensuring that staff and volunteers communicate and promote the brand (Chapleo, 2015).

Practical implications

Effective HRM practices in NPOs may directly influence volunteers working across the various operational levels of an NPO. Several NPO leaders admitted that they do not have the time or additional resources required for the effective management and upkeep of these volunteers. From volunteers who work as board members contributing to the overall strategic direction of the environmental NPO, to the volunteers engaging directly at the grass-roots level with communities, HRM is indispensable to retaining this valuable resource. Creating an enabling environment for these volunteers is important and HRM practitioners need to be cognisant of the need to educate and upskill these volunteers that are not remunerated but willing to be guided by the management of the NPOs. As such NPO managers engaging with the volunteers also require effective training and development to manage this resource. As most volunteers are sourced from the corporate world, board members and regular volunteers both need to be trained effectively on environmental principles and issues. Thus, investing in these key stakeholders requires a talent retention strategy that is central to HRM practices (Goswami et al., 2023).

Non-profit organisations leaders demonstrated the ability to empower and motivate employees for improved decision-making, thereby promoting accountability between the different levels of the NPO and uniting staff for a common purpose. Furthermore, several NPO leaders also demonstrated alertness to their environments and were often focused on the big picture. Non-profit organisations leaders thus have a similar

ability and responsibility to empower and motivate volunteers. Environmental NPO leaders are also tasked with building a culture of shared responsibility towards the environment, encouraging the corporate and government stakeholders to collaborate effectively. Goswami et al. (2023) found that organisations are more open to initiatives that benefit internal stakeholders such as employees than external stakeholders. Environmental NPOs are therefore uniquely placed to shape such initiatives to create a sense of well-being for the staff of their corporate counterparts and enable these corporates to contribute effectively to their social and environmental responsibilities, and this is evident from Figure 1.

The efficiency of HRM practices may also be linked to the organisational leadership, and aspects of transformational leadership could direct the connection between overall strategy and HRM, thus enhancing key stakeholders' mindfulness and behaviour in favour of environmental conservation (Chen & Wu, 2022). Challenges related to NPO governance include the board's interference with the executive's role, which increases executive stress levels and results in burnout, undermining the leader's performance and consequently the NPO's as well (Olinske & Hellman, 2017). Human resources management practitioners have an opportunity to enhance the working environment and improve the levels of possible leadership burnout.

In creating a harmonious working environment for their employees and their volunteers, HRM practitioners can therefore also play a role in developing advocacy for the natural environment. Effective HRM can influence employees and volunteers and raise awareness of conservation efforts to promote eco-friendly activities and green consumerism, thus aligning to SDGs 13-15 and SDG 17, for both its internal and external stakeholders, as depicted in Figure 1 (Chen & Wu, 2022). Human resources management practices such as attracting talented individuals, training and development of volunteers and staff and building an awareness of environmental concerns contribute to the overall resilience of the NPO (Singh et al., 2023).

Conclusion

Environmental NPOs have a common ground with human resources that are sourced from the corporate sector. Consequently, the human resources available to environmental NPOs are significantly diverse and complex compared to the corporate world. Thus, the HRM function of environmental NPOs plays a significant role in contributing towards society's progress in achieving the SDGs with its focus on people management. Environmental NPO HRM practitioners are uniquely positioned and could influence and enhance the achievement of SDGs 13-15 and SDG 17.

Limitations and recommendations

This study utilised a geographic delimitation of the empirical outcomes and focused solely on 11 environmental NPOs in South Africa. Consequently, the empirical outcomes may be limited to other contexts and countries from a generalisability

perspective. Therefore, the findings of this study are largely applicable to the particular context of locally established environmental NPOs operating in South Africa on a case-by-case basis.

Academic studies focusing on the South African NPO sector are limited (Choto et al., 2020); the environmental NPOs are central to the achievement of SDGs 13-15 and SDG 17; therefore further studies in this realm are recommended. The contribution of environmental NPOs to GHRM and sustainable practices also warrants further studies.

In understanding the contribution of NPO board members to the overall achievement of the NPO mission, it was suggested that changing the way that NPO board members are recruited and remunerated could make a difference in the inefficiencies present in NPO boards. Furthermore, Olinske and Hellman (2017) found that although NPO academic studies focused on management, studies related to the board and NPO leadership were lacking. It is therefore recommended that further studies explore the mechanisms related to the selection, recruitment and remuneration of NPO board members as well as the engagement between NPO board members and their executive team. The representation of NPO board members in terms of gender and race could also be explored to determine if transformation and diversity are being achieved.

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Competing interests

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Authors' contributions

S.S. was responsible for the conceptualisation, methodology, resources, writing the article, sourcing funding to publish the article, drafting and reviewing and editing the journal article, which is derived from the PhD thesis of S.S. A.M. and O.T. contributed to the article in their capacities as supervisors and contributed towards the supervision aspect of the article as well as the editing of the article and secured funding to aid the publication of the article.

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Data availability

The primary data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, S.S. upon reasonable request.

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