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Human Resource Management Practices and Decent Work in UN Global Compact: A Qualitative Analysis of Participants' Reports

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Abstract: This study aims at describing and characterizing the Human Resources practices (HRPs), as reported by organizations within the framework of the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC). That endeavor was undertaken considering the concept of decent work (DW). Specifically, we intended to analyze and verify to what extent those practices translate and incorporate the concept of DW to build a typology of commitment levels by organizations regarding the values behind UNGC. We conducted a documentary analysis on 40 annual reports of Portuguese organizations' participants of the UNGC. A qualitative content analysis using NVivo and a descriptive and cluster analysis based on coding similarity were performed. One output of this research is the design of a maturity typology of adhesion to the UNCG. Four levels were identified, reflecting expressed concerns with DW concepts and the UNGC Ten Principles and its integration into HRP. This research reflects the concerns of Human Resources Management (HRM) with the wellbeing, development, and conditions of employees and may support the design of future research and interventions, leading to more responsible and ethical HRM practices.

Keywords: decent work; United Nations Global Compact; human resources management

1. Introduction

1.1. Decent Work Concept

The roots of decent work (DW) can be traced back to 1919 with the foundation of the International Labour Organization (ILO) as part of the Treaty of Peace (also known as the Treaty of Versailles). Since its beginning, the ILO has always addressed labor issues, such as working hours, women's employment, and children's employment (International Labour Office 2009). Even before the First World War, these concerns already existed, with international attempts to legislate and define labor standards as the prohibition of night work for women in industry or the use of phosphorus in the production of matches, within the actions of the International Association for Labour Legislation, created in 1900 (Rodgers et al. 2009). However, the decent work concept was only introduced as afundamental objective of the ILO in 1999 by Juan Somavía (the Director-General of ILO at that time) at the International Labour Conference. The expression decent work integrated, from that time on, all the dispersed actions carried out by the ILO under only one concept (International Labour Office 2013a).

As a comprehensive concept, DW can be referred to as an expression, in the labor field, of the principles and values behind the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations in 1948 (dos Santos 2019). The DW integrates four strategic objectives of ILO: (i) the promotion of rights at work; (ii) employment; (iii) social protection; (iv) and social dialogue (International Labour Office Geneva 1999). This provides a worldwide

common language to integrate the discussion about labor (rights, conditions, and relations) and supporting the identification of possible practical ways of addressing the violation of human rights.

In 2003, the first effort was made to measure decent work at the 17th International Conference of Labour Statisticians (International Labour Office 2013a). A framework on the measurement of DW indicators was presented in 2008 at the 18th International Conference, covering ten substantive elements plus an additional social and economic context element of DW with a close link with the ILO's four strategic objectives (International Labour Office 2013b). This framework includes statistical indicators complemented by legal framework indicators that are more descriptive and qualitative.

Some years later, work by Ferraro and colleagues presented the first approach to measure the full range of the DW concept under the umbrella of work, organizational and personnel psychology. This approach aimed to fill a gap in current measurements by adding a different level of analysis: the workers' perspective (Ferraro et al. 2017; Ferraro et al. 2018a). According to those authors, seven dimensions cover the worker's perception of DW (Ferraro et al. 2018b) as follows:

(1) *Fundamental Principles and Values at Work* refers to a set of fundamental values and operationalization in the work context, such as interactional and procedural justice, dignity, participation, freedom, non-discrimination, and trust; (2) *Working Time and Workload* refers to a good balance between working time and personal and family time as well as good work pace and workload; (3) *Fulfilling and Productive Work* refers to the contribution of work to personal and professional fulfillment and development; (4) *Meaningful Remuneration for the Exercise of Citizenship* does not refer to the sole existence of a salary but to fair monetary compensation and benefits that allow workers and their families to have a complete and dignified role in society; (5) *Social Protection* refers to the worker's expectations of a social security system that protects both the worker and family in the case of unemployment, illness, or even death and gives a prospect of a decent retirement; (6) *Opportunities* refers to opportunities for professional development, improvements in remuneration, and the worker's perception of having a choice as a result of the availability of alternative jobs or entrepreneurship; and (7) *Health and Safety* refers to the perception of having acceptable and safe environmental conditions in the workplace that protect workers against accidents or health-related risks. This comprehensive seven-dimension model helps operationalize the DW concept, integrating various topics in the field of work, organizational, and personnel psychology research tradition around a core and coherent idea (dos Santos 2019).

Despite being a recent concept, various papers on DW have been released in the scientific literature. This is due to the impact of events such as the economic crisis of 2008/2009, which resulted in high unemployment rates and vulnerable work conditions, raising awareness to the importance of DW (e.g., Ferraro et al. 2016; Pereira et al. 2019) and also concerns with green transition side by side with DW concerns (Dziewulska and Lewis 2023; Selçuk et al. 2023). A literature review of empirical studies on DW in the field of psychology conducted by Pereira et al. (2019) showed that few studies addressed all dimensions of DW. The current study aims to contribute to understanding how human resources (HR) practices can support the implementation of DW in organizations.

Work environment conditions have always been one of the ILO's central concerns. The key objectives and overall goals of this international organization throughout history are now summarized in the DW Agenda (Rodgers et al. 2009). Furthermore, rooted in the United Nations' fundamental Principles, decent work is included in the eighth objective of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

1.2. Human Resource Management Practices

As stated above, the foundation of the ILO in 1919 aimed to address the challenging work conditions of people, at a time when some employers were starting to show concerns with employees' physical environment. In a reflection on the historical development of the Personnel Function, Torrington and Hall (1987) trace its roots to the Industrial Revolution

period and the establishment, in the UK, of the Institute of Welfare Officers in 1913. Welfare officers' main responsibility was to dispense benefits to the employees who deserve them, a tradition of welfare remaining with HR professionals. Reflecting on the literature in the field of HRM, Guest (1999) explains that research on HRM reflects mainly the agenda of management by exploring, for example, its role in firm performance but often neglecting the workers' concerns. In the literature and our professional practice, we have seen that HRM is often presented as linked with an organization's strategic initiatives to improve company performance as the significant and primary concern, with employee's wellbeing, motivation, or development a means to achieve this result.

It is worth noticing that, in the last decade, the scientific literature has brought to the discussion other aspects of the importance and impacts of HRM that go beyond financial outcomes. Some examples are HRM practices that prioritize employee wellbeing (Guest 2017); long-term human resource development, regeneration, and renewal (Stankevičiute and Savanevičiene 2018); socially responsible HR (Baek and Kim 2021); or Common Good HRM, i.e., contributions to ecological and social progress (Aust et al. 2020). Citizenship initiatives like the UNGC prioritize Environment, Social, and Governance (ESG) issues in the organization's agenda as major concerns to be incorporated in their policies and practices, including HRM. The main question, however, is to understand how HR practices can support or enact these societal objectives.

Over the last two decades, scholars have achieved considerable advances and knowledge about how HRM might be linked to employee and organizational performance. Bowen and Ostroff (2004) made an important contribution to this by understanding how HRM may be perceived as strong through the identification of features that (i) help arouse interest and attention on HRM (distinctiveness), (ii) establish relationships over time, people, and context (consistency), and (iii) contribute to a shared view between employees about what behaviors are expected and rewarded (consensus). As UNGC participants must intentionally think about how their HR practices incorporate and comply with the Ten Principles and DW, a fact that probably increases distinctiveness, consensus, and consistency between practices, it is our assumption here that the external context (being part of UNGC) can influence HR policies and practices to take into consideration the DW concept in all its dimensions.

Troth and Guest (2020) noted that the development of HRM research needs to consider multilevel perspectives on why HR practices are introduced and abandoned by organizations, namely, institutional factors in addition to individual proactivity from HR managers. HR practices in organizations are typically presented as activities covering employees' life cycle within the employment relationship, from recruitment and selection strategies, training and development, remuneration practices, and performance appraisal to career management, which may include preparation and transition to retirement. These HR practices are usually referred to as existing in all organizations. However, the simple existence of these standard practices does not necessarily mean that they incorporate employees' perspectives, concerns, and ways in which they may contribute to a good and decent work environment.

As a result of a literature review about HR practices, Latorre and colleagues concluded that the majority of surveys about HR practices include not only standard HR practices, such as training and development or performance appraisal, but items related to employee wellbeing, such as the existence of an environment free of harassment, equal opportunities, support with nonwork responsibilities, and participation in decision making (Latorre et al. 2016).

Therefore, it is relevant to explore the motives underlying the implementation of HR practices considering the Ten Principles of UNGC as well as decent work. By doing so, we may contribute to a more ethical HRM.

1.3. The United Nations Global Compact (UNGC)

The public exposure of various scandals (ethical or financial collapses) has highlighted the need for increased transparency in management practices. A fundamental pillar of this transparency process happened in 1999, when the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), in collaboration with other public and private organizations, developed what became known as the OECD Principles of Corporate Governance. These principles define a set of corporate governance standards and guidelines that foster good corporate practices: "Corporate governance relates to the internal means by which corporations are operated and controlled. (...) This, in turn, helps to assure that corporations operate for the benefit of the society as a whole." (OECD 1999, p. 7).

In 1999, at the World Economic Forum, Kofi Annan, the former UN Secretary-General, proposed a Global Compact on shared principles and values between the United Nations and the private sector, challenging business leaders to reflect on their responsibility (Post 2012). This was the start of the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC), currently the world's largest corporate sustainability initiative, with more than 12,000 companies from 156 countries (www.unglobalcompact.org accessed on 1 September 2020). A fundamental aspect of the Global Compact is that markets lack universal human values and rights (Kell 2003). Therefore, the UNGC asks companies to adhere voluntarily and embed in their practices its Ten Principles. These principles represent the fundamental core values of the UNGC's mission and cover four areas of intervention: Human Rights, Labor Standards, Environment, and Anti-Corruption.

Companies participating in the UNGC must voluntarily commit to the following actions: (a) commitment from top management to incorporate the Ten Principles of the UNGC in the strategy, decision-making processes, daily activities, and operations of the organization; (b) being accountable and transparent with this compromise, by annually reporting actions and efforts to reach responsible business activities in the four areas stated above, through a Communication on Progress (COP) report and publishing it on the UN Global Compact website; (c) engage locally and take actions that support the society where they operate, promoting the enforcement of the Ten Principles also in the actions of suppliers, business partners, customers, or the public in general; (d) make an annual financial contribution to support the work of the UN Global Compact Office; (e) since 1 January 2016, and after the adoption of SDGs by all the UN member states a few months earlier, the UNGC organizations have also been asked to guide their actions by supporting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. As summarized by Magalhães et al. (2019), the goals of the Compact are based on the distinction between a macro level (aiming to facilitate cooperation between stakeholders) and a micro level (supporting participants in the internalization of its principles into their own strategy and daily operations), as in the case of SDGs.

An essential mechanism for transparency and accountability of the company's participation in the UNGC is the annual public disclosure of the actions to support and implement the Ten Principles. This is materialized in the COP, which has three differentiation participation levels: Active, Advanced, and Learner. To be considered Global Compact Active, participants must include a statement from top management in the annual COP, reaffirming the continued support of the principles of UNGC, describing policies, procedures, or activities taken in alignment with these principles as well as a measurement of achievements. Active companies are required to submit a COP annually. Companies failing to submit a report for two consecutive years are no longer Global Compact Active and are, consequently, expelled from the UNGC.

The UNGC provides general guidance about how to report, but the COP format is flexible. They can be integrated into the way companies normally communicate with their stakeholders (e.g., sustainable or financial reports) or presented as a "stand alone" document following a free format or the basic COP template provided. UNGC also recommends the use of the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) framework as it guides companies on how to disclose actions with impacts on sustainability and performance (UN Global Compact

2012). The reporting of SDG information, although improved since its adoption by all the UN member states and, as observed by Bose and Khan in a study conducted between 2016 and 1019, is still low, with SDG8 the indicator disclosed by the highest number of companies in their study's sample period (Bose and Khan 2022).

Nonbusiness UNGC participants (e.g., academia, business associations, NGOs, labor, and public sector organizations) have different requirements to disclose information. Every two years, they must communicate their engagement via a Communication on Engagement (COE), where they identify, within their nonbusiness activity, one or more specific actions showing their support for and attention to UNGC principles and initiatives. Therefore, published COP and COE constitute a fundamental data source to study the level and depth of each participant's actions regarding the UNGC commitments.

Regarding research, during the first decade after the UNGC was launched, the scientific literature focused heavily on the concept of corporate social responsibility, reflecting on the role of public and private sectors in the defense of human rights and their motivations for joining the initiative (Centindamar and Husoy 2007; Deva 2006; Kell 2012; Post and Carroll 2003; Rasche 2009; Ziegler 2007).

The second decade shows a diversification in the research topics and an increase in the number of publications, consistent with findings from a systematic literature review conducted by Orzes et al. (2018). With the Global Compact as the background, researchers sought to understand how participants in the initiative showed adherence to the UNGC Principles, as demonstrated by the implementation of additional measures (Bernhagen and Mitchell 2010) when impacted by economic crises (Arevalo and Aravind 2010) or other global concerns, such as the COVID-19 (Mattera et al. 2021). In addition, reflections on the history of the UNGC continued to appear in the literature during this decade (Kell 2012; Post 2012; Rasche et al. 2012) and others challenging the universality of the UNGC principles, namely comparing them to Islamic Business Ethics (Khan et al. 2023).

The topic of HRM among the participants of UNGC still needs to be addressed meaningfully. However, a study examining the theoretical perspectives of ethical HRM concerning CSR is worth noting, referring to UNGC and SA8000 (social responsibility standard for companies). The study concluded that companies adopt these standards for various reasons, from a basic respect for people to potential benefits for the company, and further research is needed to understand how these differences affect HR practices (Maç and Çalış 2012; Patrus et al. 2013). Following this, a case study about a Brazilian company was published to explore relations between corporate sustainability and human resources management (Pintão et al. 2018). However, that single case study did not examine more corporations, and the concept of decent work was not included in the analysis. Although more than two decades have passed since UNGC was launched, empirical studies on the impacts of its adoption on human resource management practices are still scarce.

This study aims to examine how organizations can improve their governance regarding their involvement in the UNGC, specifically in relation to HRM and DW. In particular, this study aims to deepen knowledge about the role of HRM in integrating DW components in the context of UNGC participants, as UN principles and values may enhance and accelerate ethical practices. The scarcity of studies on this topic makes it important to analyze how these practices incorporate the concept of DW. Additionally, we will reflect on how UNGC can support the implementation of DW in organizations.

2. Materials and Methods

The present study used a documentary analysis of UNGC reports through Qualitative Content Analysis with NVivo support.

2.1. Data Sources: Published Reports

We analyzed reports of all organizations based in Portugal with active status until Dec 2018 retrieved from the UNGC official website. We found 44 organizations with published COP (Communication on Progress) or COE (Communication on Engagement).

All reports were imported into NVivo to conduct a qualitative content analysis. Four of the 44 organizations were excluded from this analysis, as their reports were published in a format incompatible with the NVivo software. The 40 organizations are from various types and activity sectors, 12 with COE and 28 with COP report formats, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Data source description.

Type	Number	Report	Sector
Academic	3	COE	Not Applicable
Business Association Local	1	COE	Not Applicable
NGO Local	3	COE	Not Applicable
Foundation	4	COE	Not Applicable
Small or Medium-sized Enterprise	1	COE	Financial Services
Small or Medium-sized Enterprise	7	COP	Gas, Water & Multiutilities (1); General Industrials (2); Industrial Transportation (1); Software and Computer Services (1); Support Services (2)
Company	21	COP	Automobiles and Parts (2); Banks (1); Beverages (1); Electricity (1); Financial Services (1); Fixed Line Telecommunications (3); Gas, Water and Multiutilities (1); General Industrials (2); General Retailers (3); Industrial Engineering (1); Industrial Transportation (1); Oil and Gas Producers (1); Pharmaceuticals and Biotechnology (1); Software and Computer Services (1); Support Services (1)

COE: Communication on Engagement; COP: Communication on Progress.

The study aims to deepen knowledge about the role of HRM in integrating DW components in the context of UNGC participants, as UN principles and values may enhance and accelerate ethical practices. This kind of research, which analyzes reports disclosed by organizations enrolled in a set of principles and values, has been published in the literature. For instance, Nicolò et al. (2023) analyzed the Communication of Progress by organizations from several countries regarding their commitment to Sustainable Development Goals. They considered this type of document self-reported data. In the present research, we can also consider our data self-reported, but while Nicolò et al. (2023) designed a quantitative approach, we designed a qualitative approach in our study.

Within the 40 organizations, we found a variable degree of detail, from comprehensive management reports to very short descriptions of the actions taken, with or without structuring these actions around the UNGC Principles.

2.2. Procedure

A qualitative content analysis of the 40 reports was performed using NVivo. Reports were analyzed in three rounds.

First round: Reading of all reports and classification of files according to activity sector and date of joining UNGC and creation of nodes corresponding to DW, HR practices, and the UN Principles.

Second round: Coding references made of the UN principles of HR practices mentioned and DW seven dimensions. Within each node, similarities and differences were checked, and as a result, categories were merged, and/or new categories were added. We considered a reference the minimum extension of text which can be understood without reading its context.

Third round: Analyzing the relationship between codes. Explored data with matrix coding and cluster analysis by comparison diagrams and coding queries, allowing the

identification of closest organizations' approaches based on coding similarities. Three researchers participated in the process, with the first analyzing raw data and then discussing with the others to reach agreements regarding criteria and doubts. This process involved several meetings and mature reflection on the qualitative content analysis.

As a first step of our methodological approach, reports were organized by coding similarity, resulting in three main clusters, which form the basic structure of the subsequent qualitative analysis. That structural configuration was obtained by performing cluster analysis (Jaccard coefficient).

The fundamental commitment of any UNGC participant is to incorporate the Ten Principles of UNGC in their daily activities and operations. Since this research aims to (i) understand how these organizations incorporate DW concepts in their reported actions and (ii) if specific patterns of HR practices could be identified, we also retrieved from NVivo the coding references that overlapped HR practices, UNGC Principles, and DW factors. As a second level of analysis, and complemented by the study of general coding similarities mentioned above, we conducted two other analyses: (a) coding similarities of DW components and (b) coding similarities of HR practices. To undertake that, we again performed a cluster analysis (Jaccard coefficient) but restricted the analysis to the correspondent codes.

3. Data Analysis, Results, and Discussion

The Global Compact groups the Ten Principles in Human Rights, Labor, Environment, and Anti-Corruption. Considering our objectives, we developed ten initial categories or codes, one for each of the Ten UN Principles, as they all have potential implications on HR practices. As the coding exercise developed, some principles became overlapped. As a result, we consider only one node for Human Rights principles (aggregating principles 1 and 2) and one node for Environment principles (aggregating principles 7, 8, and 9). This overlapping was not identified for Labor principles, so the initial four nodes were maintained, resulting in seven coding categories for the Ten Principles.

For the coding exercise of HR practices, we started by considering three categories: recruitment and selection practices, training and development, and career management. As the coding exercise developed and as references to other practices, such as internal climate surveys, community programs, or remuneration practices, appeared, three more coding categories (nodes) were created.

For the coding exercise of DW dimensions, we consider seven categories, one for each of the seven psychological factors of decent work from a worker's perspective described by Ferraro et al. (2018b). In synthesis, the coding system comprises seven principles, six HR practices, and seven DW dimensions, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Principle, DW, and HR practice-coded categories.

	Coded Categories or Nodes							N
Principles	**Human Rights**	**Labour Principles**				**Environment**	**Anti-Corruption**	**7**
	1 and 2	3	4	5	6	7, 8 and 9	10	
Decent Work	Fundamental Principles and Values at Work	Working Time and Workload	Fulfilling and Productive Work	Meaningful Remuneration for the exercise of Citizenship	Social Protection	Opportunities	Health & Safety	7
HR Practices	Training and Development	Communication practices and tools	Volunteering initiatives	Career Management and performance appraisal		Recruitment and selection	Other practices	6

3.1. Coding Process

3.1.1. Node UNGC Principles

We coded 1537 references related to the 10 Principles, with Labor Standards representing 35% of all principles coded; Human Rights 30%; Environment 21%; and Anti-Corruption 14%. References and documents coded in each UN Principle are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Principles: references coded and corresponding reports.

Principles	Human Rights	Labour Principles				Environment	Anti-Corruption
	1 and 2	Collective Bargaining and Freedom of Association (3)	Elimination of Forced or Compulsory Labour (4)	Abolition of Child Labour (5)	Non-Discrimination (6)	7, 8 and 9	10
Coded references	467	75	225	41	197	317	215
% of all coded principles	30%	35%				21%	14%
Reports	40	28	34	21	34	35	38

Labor Standards Principles 3, 4, 5, and 6: Twenty-eight organizations explicitly mention Principle 3, with some reporting the percentage of employees covered by collective labor instruments. When detailed actions are noted, they are related to processes of information and consultation of workers and labor representatives or to indexed benefits of collective work agreements in a total of 75 references coded.

Under Principle 4, references coded cover both explicit mentions of concern to reject forced or compulsory labor and actions reported in the areas of health and safety as they underly a preoccupation of organizations with the conditions of work and how people perform it. Within the 34 reports coded, examples of actions include risk assessment activities, providing protective equipment, training, and health screening.

Out of the reports analyzed, only 21 explicitly mentioned Principle 5, with only half of them reporting actions taken related to the existence of a risk assessment process of suppliers and/or implementation of means of communication about their respect of abolition of child labor, in a total of 41 coded references. As Portuguese labor legislation prohibits the work of people under 16, this can explain why these UNGC member organizations tend to refer only to potential risks in their value chain rather than to themselves.

Expression of commitment with non-discriminatory practices (Principle 6) was found in 34 organizations in a total of 197 references. These generally highlight internal policies and procedures addressing anti-discriminatory values and practices. When giving examples of actions, these mainly concern employee recruitment, selection, and career advancement opportunities. Although expressing their rejection of any form of discrimination, organizations focus primarily on gender discrimination in their initiatives.

Human Rights Principles 1 and 2: Coded references are related to simple expressions of commitment to defend and act against possible abuses. In some reports, specific actions that translate concerns with prevention are also included. Examples of these actions cover training on human rights principles, risk assessment of possible occurrences, acts addressing employees' personal development, concerns with the wellbeing within the work environment, and initiatives to support employees and their families in case of vulnerability. References, a total of 467, were identified in all 40 reports.

Environment Principles: Specific actions concerning environment principles (7, 8, and 9) were identified in 35 reports, in a total of 317 coded references, which show special attention to issues, such as efficient energy and waste management, circularity, decarbonization concerns, and mitigation of activity impacts on biodiversity. A second level of initiatives includes research and promoting actions regarding the awareness and training of employees and other stakeholders, such as subcontracted entities or the local community.

Anti-Corruption Principles: Coded references cover internal and external mechanisms to comply with ethics. Initiatives under this principle range from a simple expression of

commitment to the principle to the existence of codes of conduct and grievance mechanisms, to active actions of awareness and training to prevent corruption, bribery, or other unethical behaviors. Mentions of Principle 10 were identified in 38 reports in a total of 215 references.

It is worth noticing that the level of engagement of companies with UNGC Principles is not related to the number of practices and policies referred to in their reports but the expression of voluntary initiatives that go beyond legal obligations defined in Portuguese legislation (*Código do Trabalho*) or European Policies (*Diretivas Comunitárias*). The coding process showed a higher percentage of references related to Labor Standards (Principles 3, 4, 5) and non-discriminatory practices (Principle 6), such as the process of consultation of workers and labor representatives or internal policies and procedures addressing anti-discriminatory practices, but these are regulated in the Portuguese *Código do Trabalho* (Lei n.º 7/2009, de 12 de Fevereiro) (Código do Trabalho 2023), for example, in Artº 423º, 425º, 466º and, Artº 25º or 30º, respectively. In opposition, fewer references show innovative actions and practices such as counseling and relaxation sessions to promote wellbeing within the work environment or initiatives to support employees and their families in case of vulnerability, although reflecting a higher level of engagement to these principles.

3.1.2. Node DW Components

Codifications of DW components represented a total of 359, with the following distribution through the seven dimensions of DW according to Ferraro and colleagues' model (Ferraro et al. 2018b): *Fulfilling and Productive Work* (23%); *Fundamental Principles and Values at Work* (22%); *Opportunities* (19%); *Health and Safety* (16%); *Meaningful Remuneration for the Exercise of Citizenship* (9%); *Working Time and Workload* (6%); and *Social Protection* (5%). References and documents coded in each DW dimension are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Decent work dimensions: references coded and corresponding reports.

Decent Work	Fundamental Principles and Values at Work	Working Time and Workload	Fulfilling and Productive Work	Meaningful Remuneration for the Exercise of Citizenship	Social Protection	Opportunities	Health and Safety
Coded references	80	22	81	33	17	70	56
% of coded DW	22%	6%	23%	9%	5%	19%	16%
Reports	27	10	25	13	9	19	19

Fulfilling and Productive Work: Under this dimension, we tried to identify practices and procedures explaining the organization's concern in contributing to a sense of purpose of the work and the personal fulfilment of its employees. In 25 reports, 81 references were coded, covering aspects of co-construction of development plans, integration of employees' opinions in company practices, or the promotion of knowledge sharing, diversification of skills, and creativity.

Fundamental Principles and Values at Work: Through the codification process, we looked at the presence of references concerning transparent and fair policies or their operationalization in real work practices, coding 80 references in twenty-seven reports. Within these organizations, the main topic covered was non-discrimination and fair treatment in recruitment and selection. We also found and coded, although with less presence, references covering non-discrimination concerning remuneration, performance appraisal, or training.

Opportunities: In the coding process, we looked for organizational actions to involve employees in their career development. These include the availability of open training opportunities and internal job postings, coding 70 references in 19 reports.

Health and Safety: The search for organizational practices intended to avoid employees' accident risk and actions to improve workplace conditions was the objective of the codification process in this dimension. In 19 reports, 56 references were identified, covering aspects of training and providing protection work instructions and equipment.

Meaningful Remuneration for the Exercise of Citizenship: In the coding process, we looked for organization initiatives to support employees in more vulnerable situations or the

general attribution of social benefits designed to improve employees' and their families' lives. Only in 13 reports were references identified and coded, in a total of 33, covering aspects, such as scholarships for children, medical insurance, or various discounts for employees and the household.

Working Time and Workload: Under this dimension, coding references concern the existence of policies and initiatives intended to promote a good balance between working and personal time. Only in 10 reports was this DW dimension identified, with 22 coded references. Practices cover the assessment of employees' satisfaction with work and personal life balance, conciliation measures such as flexible and free time allowed on children's anniversaries, or advantages and discounts on family supporting structures, such as holiday camps or nearby nurseries.

Social Protection: Under this dimension, we looked for mechanisms to support employees and their families in the case of severe health and/or social risk or vulnerabilities, (including unemployment or retirement) designed by organizations in addition to existent public health and social protection schemes. Only nine organizations mention some of these mechanisms in their reports in 17 coded references. These include mainly the attribution of health or life insurance and, with less prevalence, specialized social or psychological services provided to vulnerable employees by external entities.

3.1.3. Node HR Practices

We coded 1113 references related to HR practices, with the following distribution: training and development with a significative higher presence (38%), followed by communication practices and tools (18%), volunteering initiatives (14%), and career management and performance appraisal (10%), recruitment and selection (10%), and other practices (10%). References and documents coded in each HR practice are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. HR practices: references coded and corresponding reports.

HR Practices	Training and Development	Communication Practices and Tools	Volunteering Initiatives	Career Management and Performance Appraisal	Recruitment and Selection	Other Practices
Coded references	425	199	154	113	110	112
% of coded HR	38%	18%	14%	10%	10%	10%
Reports	33	30	26	26	28	22

HR: Human Resources.

Below, we describe the coding process for each HR practice, from the most to the least prevalent in terms of number of organizations, including the topic in their reports.

Training and development: In the coding process, we looked for references to policies (stating the underlying intentions of training or development) or actual training and development initiatives. Codes were present in 33 of the 40 analyzed reports in a total of 425 training and development references, with training on health and safety issues being the most prevalent.

Communication practices and tools: References were found in 30 reports in 199 coded statements. We searched for references showing the organization's concerns in implementing communication actions to promote transparency and knowledge in various stakeholders of their HR policies and practices. The coded actions cover internal social climate surveys, topic fora, external stakeholders' surveys, implementation of training channels, or other communication initiatives and projects aiming to improve or align practices.

Volunteering initiatives: The coding process covers initiatives promoting employee participation and awareness of social or environmental issues. References were found in 26 reports in a total of 154 coded statements.

Career management and performance appraisal: In the coding process, we looked for policies and practices to promote employee development opportunities. With the possibility of overlapping contents with training and to avoid simply duplicating codifications with the

"training and development" node, the codification process considered training only when referring to preparation for career movements. References to the performance assessment processes and career paths were also included in this node. References were found in 26 reports in a total of 113 coded statements.

Recruitment and selection: We looked for references to external or internal recruitment strategies and practices in the coding process. Although all organizations likely have recruitment practices, only 28 out of 40 consider the topic in their reports. References are mainly related to knowledge and talent development and incorporating diversity concerns. References were found in 28 reports in a total of 110 coded statements.

Other practices: Through the codification process, we found content overlapping but going behind previous nodes by referencing HR policies and practices related to social aspects of employee's life, remuneration, fringe benefits, and work–life balance initiatives. References were found in 22 reports in a total of 112 coded statements.

3.2. Cross-Classification Analysis HR Practices and Principles and Decent Work

After conducting a cross-classification analysis between HR practices and each of the principles (Table 6), a more significant presence of coding references on training and development practices was evident: 277 coded simultaneously with UN Principles.

Table 6. Cross-classification HR practices and principles.

HR Practices/ Principles	Human Rights	Labour Principles				Environ- ment	Anti- Corruption	
	1 and 2	Collective Bargaining and Freedom of Association (3)	Forced/ Compulsory Labour Elimination (4)	Abolition of Child Labour (5)	Non- Discrimination (6)	7, 8 and 9	10	Total
Training and Development	137	1	51	0	32	12	44	277
Communication practices and tools	67	5	19	1	7	4	34	137
Volunteering initiatives and Investment in the community	29	0	1	0	2	4	0	36
Career Management and Performance appraisal	56	0	5	0	12	0	3	76
Recruitment and Selection	34	0	8	0	32	2	5	81
Other hr practices	56	1	18	0	11	0	2	88
Total	379	7	102	1	97	22	88	

The reasoning for coding some of the 'training and development' simultaneously in human rights principles (apart from training programs on human rights issues) was the explicit reference, made by organizations, to concerns about the wellbeing and personal development of employees, underlying the training practices, i.e., not merely addressing job skills. In what concerns Principle 4, the second most coded, simultaneously with training and development, can be explained by the fact that under this category, we considered training related to *Health and Safety* at work.

According to International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 29 'Forced Labor Convention', forced or compulsory labor is defined as 'all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily'. Considering that our sample is constituted of organizations based in Portugal, although some with multinational operations or supply chains, they are obliged by Portuguese Labor law to comply with labor standards related to minimum wage salary or working hours. So, our basic thought was to search for training and development

activities that go beyond the strict compliance with forced labor but incorporate a concern with employees' physical and mental wellbeing, usually related to health and safety policies at work.

Under 'training and development' practices related to Principle 10, we consider all training activities related to training on ethics procedures and policies. As can be seen in Table 6, this cross-classification retrieved 44 coding references, being the third most referred training topic in this analysis. The elimination of discrimination (Principle 6) appears in the fourth position of organizations' top concerns for training, quite distant from the next on *Environment Principles*. Only one reference for training and development was coded simultaneously with Principle 3, as in this specific case, the collective agreement is a form of regulating the sector's activities concerning vocational training.

The cross-classification analysis between HR practices and the DW dimensions (Table 7) showed that 'training and development' is the HR practice that more frequently incorporates DW, with 158 references coded simultaneously, having a significant presence in four of the seven DW dimensions (*health and safety*, *fundamental principles, and values at work*, *fulfilling and productive work*, and *opportunities*).

Table 7. Cross-classification HR practices and DW.

HR Practices\DW	DW 1: Fundamental Principles and Values	DW 2: Working Time and Workload	DW 3: Fulfilling and Productive Work	DW 4: Meaningful Remuneration	DW 5: Social Protection	DW 6: Opportunities	DW 7: Health and Safety	Total
Training and Development	37	5	35	2	3	35	41	158
Communication practices and tools	16	7	22	1	0	12	16	74
Volunteering initiatives and Investment in the community	2	1	30	3	1	1	0	38
Career Management and Performance appraisal	12	4	15	0	1	43	3	78
Recruitment and Selection	30	1	6	1	0	22	4	64
Other hr practices	8	15	6	30	17	3	2	81
Total	105	33	114	37	22	116	66	

We observe that organizations tend to better address a specific DW dimension with one HR practice than others, with 'training and development' being the exception.

The DW dimensions that more mirrored the way organizations communicate their practices are *Opportunities* and *Fulfilling and Productive Work*. We coded, under career management and performance appraisal (the highest HR practice for DW *Opportunities*), discourses not only focused on the impacts on the present conditions of work but also addressing the challenges and future needs of employees. The *Fulfilling and Productive Work* dimension appears to be more related to 'training and development' practices as well as 'volunteering initiatives and Investment in the community'. In synthesis, each HR practice can play a different role in the integration and operationalization of each DW dimension.

3.3. Cluster Analysis

In a second level of conceptualization, after performing cluster analysis by coding similarity (Jaccard's coefficient), the 40 organizations were grouped into three main clusters (Figure 1).
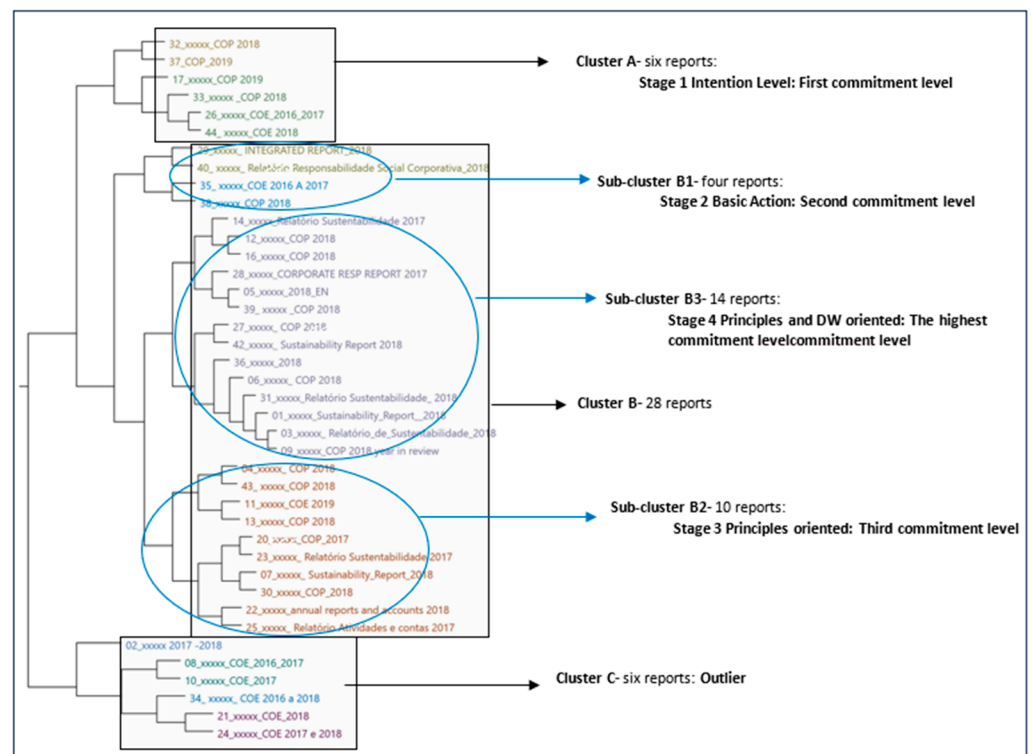
Figure 1. Maturity typology.

The performed analysis included cluster matrix coding (codes per document) to find coding similarities among each cluster's documents and analyze the corresponding references' content. A cluster (cluster A) of six organizations shows little or no incorporation of DW components in their actions, with a maximum of three coding references per organization. No actions to promote the DW components *Working time and workload*, *Social Protection*, and *Health and Safety* were identified in the coding process. In what concerns the DW component *Fundamental Principles and Values at Work*, we identified an example of a practice (communicate career development criteria to all employees) only in a single organization, which can translate some concern to comply with procedural justice and non-discrimination and, for this reason, coded as a DW component (1). Organizations refer to their commitment to the Ten Principles in vague terms, except for *Environmental principles*, where some practical examples are presented (e.g., recycling, energy efficiency measures, or paper consumption). All organizations in this cluster present more references connected to *Human Rights Principles* (1 and 2) than the other eight. We name this cluster *Weak Commitment or Intention Level* (first stage of commitment).

Another cluster (cluster B) composed of twenty-eight organizations was obtained. Considering the number of organizations, a more specific level of analysis was conducted, dividing this cluster into three sub-clusters. A sub-cluster (B1), composed of four organizations, presents a similar pattern to cluster one in terms of the distribution of coding density per node. However, concerning Principle 10, one of these four organizations showed a different coding pattern by referring to various actions about ethical issues, from training and awareness sessions to detailed information about ethical committee duties, frequency of meetings, and the number of cases reported via an ethical line.

A possible reason for this exception may be that this organization is listed on the Portuguese stock exchange market, which specifies corporate governance practices and reporting transparency. In common with reports from cluster A, very few references to DW components were identified in this sub-cluster, with allusions to specific actions being the exception (e.g., DW factor 7 *Health and Safety* "we have been running a meditation program that promotes the full use of the mind through …"). In these organizations, we also

found vague statements when showing their intention to comply with the Ten Principles (e.g., "We value our business behavior, ethics, and conduct, and extend this to all our employees and contractors,") but these organizations also combined it with specific actions such as "internal assessment of potential human rights violations" and the "promotion of workshops as a raising awareness initiatives". We named this cluster *Basic Action* (a 2nd stage of commitment). In a sub-cluster (B2), composed of 10 organizations, we noted the presence of many actions aiming to transmit compliance with the Ten Principles, although less representation of Principles 3 and 5 was found (*Collective Bargaining* and *Abolition of child labor*). However, regarding DW factors, only *Fulfilling and Productive Work* and *Fundamental Principles and Values at Work* were identified with some expression in these reports. Actions reported include motivational sessions to promote wellbeing by encouraging employees to find new ways of doing things, new perspectives on their professional practice, and the promotion of training and academic qualifications. Also, many volunteering social programs are referred to by these organizations, signifying positive impacts for workers and organizations. We named this cluster *Principles oriented* (a 3rd stage of commitment).

Another sub-cluster (B3 composed of 14 organizations) shows a different configuration in what concerns the Ten Principles, with *Forced and compulsory labor* (4), non-discrimination (6), and *Environmental Principles* (7, 8, 9) as the most addressed in their reports. Various and more detailed initiatives can be found in these reports. Initiatives to minimize and prevent work accidents and occupational diseases are a common and central concern, which shows these companies' attitudes against forced and compulsory work practices. In what concerns non-discrimination, these companies tend to express various initiatives to reject and act against different types of discrimination (e.g., gender, race, age, religion, disabilities), and through various human resource practices (e.g., recruitment, career advancement, remuneration), nine of these organizations refer to the existence of diversity policies or at least the presence of policies or procedures addressing the topic of anti-discrimination. When addressing *Environmental issues*, this sub-cluster presents direct impacts of their activities, generally assuming the importance of precautionary environmental actions for the sustainability of their business. Although not with the same coding density as the above-referred principles, ethical issues (Principle 10) also have an essential presence in these companies' reports. The coding of DW components in this sub-cluster revealed that *Working time and workload* and *Social protection* factors are almost excluded from these reports. If, from one side, these organizations show some maturity when thinking and acting on environmental issues or preventing discrimination or forced labor, surprisingly, they do not seem to consider these two fundamental components of DW. We named this cluster *Principles and DW oriented* (the 4th and highest commitment level).

In the third and last cluster (C), six organizations (three foundations, two NGOs, and one academic institution) presented COE disclosure. These reports address mainly external stakeholders. They support the UNGC Principles, but no internal actions involving their workers are stated. A single exception referring to Environmental Certification refers to the involvement of workers. This type of report can explain why the qualitative analysis did not find a single coding reference concerning DW factors or HR practices and why this third cluster (cluster C) presents an entirely different pattern and outlier position. Therefore, we named this cluster an outlier, and as it comprehends only Communication on Engagement (COE), reports were not included in the maturity typology.

4. Conclusions

The incorporation of UN Principles and DW components in business practices is a call from UNGC.

The four-level maturity typology emerging from this study results from a qualitative analysis of organizations' discourses on how they incorporate the UN Principles and DW in HR practices. A first level identified organizations neither incorporating principles nor DW in their practices. At the second level, principles are already present, but DW is vaguely assumed. A third level suggests a more mature level in what concerns principles and can be

characterized as the first level incorporating DW in HR practices. The fourth level reflects more capacity to translate principles and DW in actual or even in precautionary actions, although this exercise is more easily achieved in what concerns principles than DW. This typology of adhesion translates the challenges and difficulties organizations face in the process of transforming intention into tangible impact on their employee's wellbeing.

Taking into consideration that (i) ethical values, human rights, and DW concerns are core and central to the UNGC, (ii) support and guidance to actions are addressed by the UNGC to their members, both through their official site and/or the local networks; (iii) UNGC members are committed to publicly communicate the progress of their actions, which is also communicated and shared by these organizations to all its employees, regardless their level or role, as supported by the result of the conducted qualitative analysis, disclosing training and development and communications practices and tools, as the HR practices more frequently referred to; (iv) different maturity levels characterized by more or less expressed concerns with DW concepts into HR practices. This led us to elaborate on the following propositions about the contributions of HR practices to a decent work environment within UNGC members.

The awareness and call for action for a decent work environment (context promoted by UNGC) support and encourage more proactivity, both in leadership and employees' attitudes, to also accomplish this endeavor. The HR practices can play a fundamental role in disseminating knowledge and in integrating into practices decent work fundamental values, in so doing, causing reciprocal behavior from employees, which also supports the organizational process of transforming intentions into actions.

While contextual factors of work, such as demands for diversity, more flexible work and life balance arrangements, or technology developments and their impacts on job design affect all companies, UNGC establishes guides for their participants, which probably result in more consolidation and maturity in the way they attempt to comply with the UN Principles and DW and incorporate them in their practices, as HR practices are a fundamental tool to support this ambition. In synthesis, having principles and DW components as the background when reporting may accelerate their maturity level, as future policies and practices need to be designed with these concerns in mind.

We identify some limitations in our work, namely the use of a unique source of information (reports) and a single reporting year, so we suggest three streams of work for future research: (i) the integration of multi-source methodology, including employee perceptions of HR practices to better understand how organizations really incorporate these societal objectives; (ii) the role of employees to support this ambition; (iii) and longitudinal study, deepening the understanding of maturity typology, as we cannot ascertain from our study that organizations deliberately seek to introduce more respectful HR practices (aligned with UN Principles) because they participate in UNGC.

HRM has a fundamental role in the quality of life of employees and communities. This study can provide valuable insights to HR professionals in developing practices more aligned with the principles and DW agenda.

HRM has a fundamental role in the quality of life of employees and communities, as we assist today with a growing interest and significance of decent work, both in the scientific literature and labor legislation, expressively addressing the topic and consequently enforcing HR policies and procedures in the organizational context, to contribute to this challenge. This study can provide valuable insights to HR professionals in developing practices more aligned with the principles and DW agenda.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable: The study was conducted with public data available regarding the corporations on the website on UNGC.

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