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Sustainability in the Supply Chain: Analyzing the Role of the Focal Company and Training in the Implementation of SDGs

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Abstract: Understanding how training can contribute to employee awareness, development of skills, competencies, and knowledge of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in supply chains and the role of the focal company still remains unanswered. Thus, this article had the purpose of investigating the performance of a company in the Brazilian electricity sector in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the supply chain. A review of the literature on the SDGs and the importance of focal companies and training for their execution was carried out in order to theoretically support the study. Then, the case study technique was used to understand “how” and “which” training practices are being implemented in the supply chain to make the management of the SDGs more effective. The results indicate: (i) that the systematic application of training by the focal company is crucial for the implementation of SDGs in the supply chain, (ii) that the focal company plays an important role in leading the implementation of the SDGs in the supply chain, and (iii) that the partnerships between supply chain members are important and facilitate sustainable management in the supply chains. Additionally, we present a robust set of training practices conducted in the supply chain and the results achieved.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goals; training; focal company; sustainability in supply chains; 2030 Agenda; emerging economy; Brazil



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1. Introduction

Topics related to environmental issues such as greenhouse gas emissions, global warming, and waste management are increasingly being discussed and have been putting pressure on organizations to redesign and rethink their working methods [1], including in Latin America [2,3].

In Latin America and in other parts of the world, most of the economy is driven by the private sector [4], considered an important stakeholder that could spearhead the evolution of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and, consequently, the fulfillment of the 2030 Agenda [5,6]. Among the private sector organizations, the energy sector industries are considered relevant, as they are able to play an important social role by contributing with their products to the expansion of the national electricity grid, improving the population’s living standards, reducing poverty, and stimulating economic growth [7]. However, individually, the actions of these organizations tend to be punctual and achieve non-significant results in favor of sustainable development. Therefore, sustainability-related strategies must go beyond the internal environment of organizations, reaching their supply chains [8]. In order for that to happen, organizations have been adopting different practices/strategies to integrate social and sustainability principles into their dealings with their supply chain partners [9].

One of the strategies is for a focal company to work as a mentor, directly engaging suppliers in actions to improve sustainable development [10], dedicating resources and time to carry out supplier training and education activities for sustainability [11], sustainability seminars [12], and exchange of knowledge and experiences in sustainability [13]. The idea is to respond to the countless pressures of stakeholders and align its supply chains with the new market trends, taking economic, social, and environmental aspects into account [14].

Thus, the focal company plays a strategic role in the sustainable management of the supply chain [15], opening new paths and trends toward sustainability, such as green supply chain management (GSCM) [16], circular economy [17,18], corporate social responsibility (CSR) [19], industrial ecology [20], sustainability science [21], sustainable procurement [22], which contributes directly to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and to increase resilience in the supply chain [23], as sustainability can act as a facilitator of resilience [24] supporting better decision making and contributing to risk reduction, for example, in the case of supply chain disruptions such as the COVID-19 outbreak.

In this work, we are based on the resource-based vision theory (RBV), in which companies can expand their competitiveness and obtain competitive advantages by developing critical resources and capabilities [25]. Among those resources, human resources management (HRM) is considered essential to achieve organizational results and should therefore be aligned with operations management [26] and the company's strategies [27].

Among the HRM practices that can be adopted in order to achieve goals and objectives, training has been gaining prominence, as it is able to develop human resources in favor of a more sustainable society [28], being considered necessary by experts for the advancement of environmental sustainability [3,29] and a basic tool for management focused on sustainability in the supply chain [30], because it is able to break the most common barriers (awareness, commitment and expertise) for implementing sustainability in supply chains [31].

Despite the importance that the specialized literature has given the subject [3,28,32], the number of research studies that have explored the contributions of training to sustainability in supply chains is still small [3,33], especially if we consider the context of developing countries, Latin America [34], and the role of training for effective implementation of the SDGs [28]. Thus, understanding the role of focal companies and how they have been managing the training and development of the workforce in Brazil might be relevant in order to cooperate with the advancement of sustainable practices and the consolidation of the 2030 Agenda in the supply chains of emerging countries and in other regions of the world.

Therefore, the guiding questions of this research are: "how" training practices are being implemented by a focal company in Brazil in its supply chain with a view to fulfill the 2030 Agenda? "Which" training practices are being implemented by a focal company in Brazil in its supply chain with a view to fulfill the 2030 Agenda. In addition, what is the role of focal companies in the implementation of SDG's in the supply chain?

In order to achieve the objectives of this research, this work is subdivided as follows: Sections 2 and 3 bring, respectively, a brief discussion on supply chains, focal companies, and SDGs, and on training and development. Section 4 presents the methodology used, Section 5, the results, Section 6, the discussions, and the last section brings our conclusions.

2. Supply Chain, Focal Company, and SDGs

The concept of supply chains has been used to describe the planning, control of materials and information flows between companies that are involved in the processes that make it possible to deliver the goods and services promised to customers [35], in other words, they make up a network of companies that are involved in the processes of adding value to products and services, from suppliers to the end consumer [36].

This supply chain network structure can be complex with several links between its members [37], thus, it is important to have a company with influence and leadership over the chain or part thereof. To Bellido and Heras [38], a company that leads said supply

chain, or part thereof, is called a focal company, with such a company being responsible for setting rules and directly contacting customers, or even projecting the products offered by the supply chain.

In the last decades, these focal companies have been suffering countless pressures from stakeholders to have a better socio-environmental performance, therefore they feel the need to convey such demands to their supply chains through actions and initiatives focused on their suppliers, with the purpose of ensuring more suitable socio-environmental practices throughout the chain [8].

According to Pinto [39], the pressures for effective management have increased the demand for environmentally friendly and socially responsible products and services. These pressures from internal and external audiences present significant challenges and lead companies to integrate sustainable practices into their supply chain.

To De Carvalho and Barbieri [8], a characteristic seen in sustainability-oriented focal companies is the internal alignment of the business through social and environmental goals so that social and environmental development becomes one of their critical factors. Focal companies therefore display sustainability initiatives in comparison to other layers of the supply chain and are responsible for driving sustainability throughout the entire chain [40], and one of the strategies that can be adopted in order to advance in good sustainability practices is the internalization of the SDGs in supply chains.

The SDGs are important instruments to guide social and sustainable development, as they are able to incorporate a shared view that is fair to all human beings. The SDGs are made up of 17 goals and comprise 169 targets, the ambition of which is to act collaboratively in order to fulfill the agenda for sustainable development by 2030 [41].

In this context, and considering that the private sector has a unique and unquestionable role in the advancement of the SDGs [42], that the development of suppliers and research studies on Sustainable Supply Chain Management (SSCM) in emerging economies is considered relevant [43], and that, therefore, good practices in the supply chains are essential for sustainability, we need to find tools that can facilitate the transition into a more sustainable world. Among those tools, training is considered essential [28].

3. Training and Development

People's competencies are essential for the performance of organizations; therefore, good competency management and personnel development at the organization, team, group, and individual levels are important to elevate the organization's ability to create and deliver value [44].

In order to achieve the competencies and development of people, training is considered an essential activity [3,44,45] able to provide and develop knowledge, skills, and behaviors to meet requirements [46] and improve their work performance [47], providing employees with the necessary attitudes, knowledge, and skills for more proactive management.

Training is considered a key element for implementing environmental management systems [48], "green" supply chain practices (GSCM) [3,49], corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices (RSC) [50], in addition to being essential for implementing the circular economy (CE) [51,52] and facilitating the implementation and continuous improvement of processes and products [3]. Hence, training can facilitate and help to unlock the implementation of the SDGs in organizations and their supply chains.

In spite of the importance of training to provide employees with the necessary competencies, attitudes, skills, and behaviors in favor of sustainability, its role has just recently started being investigated with greater emphasis and is still little studied as a topic [32], with a shortage of research on its effect on management [29] and a lack of research effectively integrating and systematizing the knowledge available in organizations, especially when pertaining to supply chains [3] and the implementation/management of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. This work explores this research gap, adopting the work methodology explained in the next section.

4. Materials and Methods

Due to the lack of empirical research on the integration of sustainability [53], this study uses the case study technique. Case studies are among the technical procedures most recommended by the literature as they provide a richness in descriptions and explanations of phenomena [54] and complex social phenomena [55]. They are widely used in management and strategy research [56,57], whether to perfect a new theory or to test and refine an already established one [58], in addition to being important to studies on supply chains [59] and on new or emerging fields such as SDG management in supply chains [60,61].

Case studies can be multiple or single [62]. In this work, we adopted the single case study, as it developed in a single company where the “phenomenon” is occurring. The company that is the subject of this research is part of the electricity sector; it was founded over 46 years ago, has 520 employees, and is considered one of the largest manufacturers of single- and three-phase distribution transformers in Latin America, with single-phase automatic voltage regulator and dynamic reactive power compensator lines also in its product portfolio.

Its manufacturing plant occupies over 30 thousand m² of built-up area and has an average production capacity of 6500 transformers and 160 regulators per month. It is currently certified by the ISO 9001:2015 (Quality Management Systems—Requirements), ISO 14001:2015 (Environmental management systems—Requirements with guidance for use), and ISO 45001:2018 (Occupational health and safety management systems—Requirements with guidance for use) standards, has had the Brazilian Energy Efficiency Program seal since 2019, it follows the guidelines of the ISO 37301:2021 (Compliance management systems—Requirements with guidance for use), ISO 20400:2017 (Sustainable procurement—Guidance), and ISO 26000:2010 (Guidance on social responsibility) standards.

In addition, the company has been a member of the UN Global Compact since 2016 and has been standing out in social, environmental, and corporate indicators of electric power companies in Brazil; furthermore, similar single case study approaches have been used in other works involving supply chains, such as those by Genovese et al. [63]; Leigh and Li [64]; Pohlmann et al. [65].

The specialized literature states that one of the sources of evidence for case studies is interviews applied to those primarily responsible who have the information one intends to collect [62]. Interviews are an efficient way to collect empirically rich data, particularly when the phenomenon of interest is infrequent, being subtended in the minds of interviewees [66]. In addition, data collection can have its reliability improved when multiple sources of evidence are adopted [62].

Thus, from the gap found in the literature review (Scopus and Web of Science) we elaborated problem issues to direct our research and created the case study protocol [62] that gave rise to the semi-structured interview script (Appendix A—Schedule 1) which was applied during the months of April and May 2021 to the person in charge of managing the SDGs (with more than 8 years of experience)—interviewee (1) and the training and development manager (with more than 15 years of experience—interviewee (2) of the focal company. It is noteworthy that to correct errors giving more credibility to the data collection instrument it was sent to three PhD professors in the area. Additionally, two SDG managers of focal companies (with more than 10 years of experience as suppliers for the focal company) were interviewed (interviewees 3 and 4). In total, there were 4 interviews (lasting approximately 4 h each), complemented with personal observations, informal conversations, following a few training sessions, revising documents, reports, visiting the focal company and two companies that are suppliers for the focal company, complementing what is commonly called method triangulation, being consistent with the specialized literature [62].

Finally, for data analysis, we synthesized, systematized, and cross-referenced all the information related to the interviews and documents collected, seeking to develop a self-

explanatory scheme with response patterns to establish conclusions and compared in the next section.

5. Results

To understand what were the motivations that led the company to adopt the 2030 Agenda, we asked the head of the sustainability area (interviewee 1) claimed that

“SDG management was motivated (in a way, its adoption was required) in 2016, when the company took part in a sustainability workshop promoted by one of the largest energy companies in the world, an Italian multinational corporation, in Niteroi, RJ. That was where we learned about the SDGs and started managing them in our company and our suppliers.”

Thus, in 2016, the company launched its project titled “SDGs as a business strategy,” the purpose of which was to attempt to integrate the 17 Sustainable Development Goals to the company’s strategies. According to the SDG area manager, a management committee was created, comprised by eight (8) employees in management positions (one from the sustainability area, one from the procurement area, one from the sales area, one from the quality area, one from financial administration, one from the HR area, one from the production area, and one from the management systems area), properly identified and approved by the senior management; this team is directly connected to the company’s superintendent. Interviewee 1 commented that

“We have inserted the pillars of sustainability into our strategic planning and started formally monitoring our suppliers in the social and economic dimensions and in greater depth in the environmental dimension, since we had good experience, as we had already been carrying out environmental management actions internally. Also in 2016, we created our Priority Matrix, highlighting what would be the priority actions for an effective management of the SDGs and alignment with the 2030 Agenda.”

Still in 2016, the company signed the UN Global Compact signatory letter. The Global Compact (headquartered in New York) is a voluntary initiative launched in 2000 by the then UN secretary general, Kofi Annan, aiming to encourage and provide guidelines for companies to align their strategies and operations with the 10 universal principles in the human rights, labor, environment, and anti-corruption areas and develop actions for the sake of society’s challenges [67,68]. Currently, the Global Compact has more than 16 thousand members between companies and organizations, encompassing 161 countries [69].

Although the Global Compact and SDGs are global sustainability initiatives, they differ in some aspects: the Global Compact is a business-oriented framework where companies and organizations can express their interest in or commitment to following the principles in the way they see fit; the SDGs, in turn, are a broad-scope intergovernmental sustainable development framework with concrete and specific targets and indicators that can be measured and monitored [70].

In 2017, seeking to further align its actions with the SDGs, the company revised its internal documents and prepared new performance indicators (which already monitored the quality, environment, and health and safety dimensions). According to interviewee 1,

“One of those documents, which started the monitoring of the supply chain, was called General Conditions for Procuring Goods, Inputs, and Services, in which aspects related to the SDGs were inserted for its supply chain.”

According to interviewee 1,

“In early 2018, our SDG management team together with the procurement area started mapping our suppliers and inserted critical success criteria for managing the SDGs. This action resulted in the preparation of a management program based on the ISO 20400—Sustainable Procurement standard.”

In the second semester of 2018, according to the company's records, the first Value Chain Sustainability Workshop was held, with the participation of the company's senior management, management committee, customers, and suppliers, in addition to other institutional partnerships. According to the focal company's HR manager (interviewee 2),

"In this event, we launched our procedure titled—Supplier Guidelines, in accordance with ISO 20400 and the 2030 Agenda."

This document is intended to measure supplier performance. According to interviewee 1, "we created these indicators to measure four dimensions of our suppliers: performance (product/service quality and delivery period), health and safety, sustainability (economic, social, and environmental), and compliance. In total, these dimensions together add up to 100 points, with suppliers needing to reach at least 40 points for the performance indicator and 30 points between health and safety, sustainability, and compliance to be fit for future supplies; if a supplier does not meet the minimum requirement, an action plan needs to be prepared to correct the deviations and must be approved by our company." Table 1 summarizes these indicators.

Table 1. Maximum score for each dimension.

Maximum Score						
Performance		Health and Safety	Sustainability			Compliance
Quality	Delivery Period		Economic	Social	Environmental	
50 points		20 points	20 points			10 points

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Thus, still in the words of interviewee 1,

"In this 1st Sustainability Workshop with our supply chain, we intended to formally present the company's new posture in its supply chain to all of our suppliers." In addition, according to interviewee 2, "we wanted to raise awareness among our suppliers about the need to incorporate the 2030 Agenda and form partnerships in order to implement the actions [...] we also sought to train a few of our suppliers' employees in the initial concepts of sustainability and the 2030 Agenda with this workshop."

After the first workshop, interviewee 2 stated that

"35 suppliers, located throughout the national territory, based on criteria of supply volume, raw materials inserted into the production process, and business relationship, were invited to participate in training sessions and discussions (such as the use of ICTs—Information and Communication Technologies) with the intent to foster the supply chain with regard to adjustments to the 2030 Agenda. In said training sessions and discussions, continuing education strategies and a helpline with a technical team were developed, and emphasis was given to the sharing of practices that companies had been adopting internally."

These training sessions were mostly held by the actual heads of each area of the focal company; for instance, we could identify training sessions conducted by the head of the project and development area who addressed the topic of eco-design and sustainable procurement, the sustainability area who shared the actions carried out by themselves at the focal company, the head of the quality and continuous improvement area who addressed the topic of implementing preventive actions.

We were also able to identify that the training sessions held by the focal company followed procedures in line with the ISO 10015:2001 standard: identifying training needs, planning training sessions, and conducting and evaluating training results. Table 2 shows the dynamics of related procedures in training sessions offered by the focal company.

Table 2. Procedures of the training process.

Procedures	Actions Conducted
Defining training needs	Identifying training needs with supply managers and the SDG committee in the focal company and managers of companies with a low rating in sustainability indicators and companies considered critical to the focal company.
Planning training sessions	Once the necessary training to meet the demands of the focal company and its production chain has been identified, training sessions are planned and allocated on a schedule. The human resources department and the SDG committee of the focal company carry out the process of surveying who, where, and how the training will be given.
Conducting training sessions	The training sessions are performed (online) on a weekly basis and last approximately 3 h as planned in the previous step. In this step, new training needs are also suggested, arising from the training that is being given, which then restart the procedures/stages mentioned herein.
Evaluating training results	Training effectiveness is monitored through performance indicators managed by the focal company. More specifically, there are two indicators: Supplier Quality Index (SQI) and Supplier Performance Index (SPI).

Source: Adapted from [46].

Furthermore, we were able to identify reports from audits conducted by the company on a yearly basis, in loco, and supply risk assessment audits at a few suppliers, which was confirmed by interviewees 3 and 4 (suppliers). To interviewee 3,

“These audits also serve as feedback for potential new training sessions within the chain.”

Interviewee 1 claims that

“With the success of our training programs and the search for companies from other industries in the city, for example, the city’s footwear industry, in the year 2020, the company has a new partnership and incorporates 4 other companies from other production industries.”

It is also worth mentioning that this project also has partnerships with the public and private sectors, such as: the city hall and business schools in the municipality, with the purpose of disseminating knowledge and developing skills and abilities necessary for the management of SDGs.

Table 3 displays the six (6) dimensions (environment, social responsibility, health and safety, human rights, compliance, and social projects) that the focal company listed as essential for proactive SDG management. For each of those dimensions, ten (10) types of training sessions were planned and conducted, and thirty-eight (38) requirements were established for suppliers to meet.

In Table 3, we can verify the status of each requirement before applying training sessions and after applying training sessions. For example, training B—how to collect and control greenhouse gases had the following requirement: 2—Carry out the inventory of greenhouse gases, but, before the focal company offered this training, none of the 35 companies had the proper inventory, and, after the training, all 35 companies carried out the inventory, i.e., 100% adherence.

It is also worth noting that, from the review of internal documents, training sessions were also given that were not directly linked to sustainable management but that indirectly affected the global management of companies, such as: ISO 9001 training (2015 version), how to prepare and file Communications on Progress (CoP) to the UN Global Compact, and training sessions in partnership with the Brazilian Micro and Small Business Support Service (SEBRAE) such as: finance, digital marketing, strategic planning, and online sales.

Table 3. Training sessions and their results.

Dimension	Training Sessions Conducted	Requirement	Before Training—Companies That Had the Requirements		After Training—Companies That Had the Requirements		
			Number of Companies	% of Companies That Have Them	Number of Companies	% of Companies That Had Them	
All	A—Presenting the SDGs and their goals	1—Adhere to the Global Compact and incorporate the SDGs into the company’s strategic planning	0	0%	35	100%	
Environment	B—How to control and collect greenhouse gases	2—Carry out the inventory of greenhouse gases	0	0%	15	42%	
	C—ISO 14001:2015: Environmental Management Systems requirements with usage guidance	3—Achieve the ISO 14001:2015 certification	3	8%	18	51%	
	D—Waste management plan and achievement of the Certificate of Waste of Interest Handling (CADRI)	4—Control liquid, atmospheric emissions, and solid waste generated in processing	7	20%	30	85%	
		5—Have a destination or treatment for generated effluents	35	100%	35	100%	
		6—Verify the origin of raw materials, with regard to their extraction/production, in order to avoid purchasing products that cause damage to the environment and disrespect environmental legislation	8	22%	35	100%	
		7—Have a plan that includes waste management (reduce/reuse/recycle) or gives it the correct destination	4	11%	35	100%	
		E—Environmental management policy	8—Have an environmental management policy that is understood, implemented, and maintained at all levels of the organization	3	8%	35	100%
	Continues ...	F—Environmental Aspect and Impact Surveys	9—Identify and communicate the significant aspects and impacts of each of the company’s activities	3	8%	35	100%
			10—Establish, implement, control, and maintain operating controls of the processes necessary to meet the requirements of the environmental management system	3	8%	35	100%
		G—Mandatory licenses, reports, and programs for Environmental Management	11—Have an environmental license with the relevant body within the validity period	32	91%	35	100%
12—Have an LTCAT (Technical Report on Environmental Working Conditions)			31	88%	35	100%	
13—Have a PPRA (Environmental Risk Prevention Program)			28	80%	35	100%	

Table 3. Cont.

Dimension	Training Sessions Conducted	Requirement	Before Training—Companies That Had the Requirements		After Training—Companies That Had the Requirements	
			Number of Companies	% of Companies That Have Them	Number of Companies	% of Companies That Had Them
Social Responsibility	H—NBR ISO 26000 standard (updated version)	14—Implement social actions aimed at contributing to the development of the surrounding community	16	45%	35	100%
Health and Safety	I—NBR ISO 45001 standard (updated version)	15—Have a PCMSO (Occupational Health Medical Control Program)	26	74%	35	100%
		16—Conduct admission and periodic exams	32	91%	35	100%
		17—Employees have training in NR 35 (Regulatory Standard for Work at Heights)	8	22%	35	100%
		18—Employees have training in NR 10 (Regulatory Standard for Safety in Electricity Facilities and Services). *Note: Only 9 companies fit into this item, as the others do not have electrical activities	2	22%	9	100%
		19—NOT have evidence of the use of child and forced labor and NOT maintain business relationships with partners who use it	35	100%	35	100%
Human Rights	J—ISO 19600, human rights policy, labor policy, social responsibility policy	20—Have evidence of actions aimed at employees' well-being and quality of life	30	85%	35	100%
		21—Observe the Legal Requirements and Principles of International Instruments (ILO), with special emphasis on the international standard SA 8000, related to social responsibility	35	100%	35	100%
		22—Meet the category's collective agreement regarding the established wage floor and percentage of readjustment, and be punctual in paying its employees regarding salary, vacation, and thirteenth salary	35	100%	35	100%
		23—Properly collect social security charges, severance payment fund (FGTS), and labor claims	35	100%	35	100%

Table 3. Cont.

Dimension	Training Sessions Conducted	Requirement	Before Training—Companies That Had the Requirements		After Training—Companies That Had the Requirements	
			Number of Companies	% of Companies That Have Them	Number of Companies	% of Companies That Had Them
Continues ...	Continues ...	24—Comply with the quota for employees hired as minor apprentices (Law 10,097/2000—if it has more than 10 employees)	14	40%	35	100%
		25—Comply with the quota for disabled employees hired (Law 8213/91)	8	22%	35	100%
		26—Provide benefits such as: health, medical, dental, and life insurance—at least one type)	35	100%	35	100%
		27—Not be included in the Ministry of Labor’s “Dirty List” of Forced Labor (ordinance no. 540/2004)	35	100%	35	100%
		28—Respect employees’ right to unionize	35	100%	35	100%
		29—Not have been fined for slave or child labor	35	100%	35	100%
		30—Have specific anti-discrimination clauses or actions	12	34%	35	100%
		31—Have a human rights policy	8	22%	35	100%
		32—Conduct human rights due diligence	3	8%	24	68%
Compliance	J—ISO 19600, human rights policy, labor policy, social responsibility policy	33—Have a code of ethics and conduct	4	11%	35	100%
		34—Carry out compliance risks	2	6%	35	100%
		35—Have a compliance policy	9	26%	35	100%
		36—Publicize its compliance reports	8	23%	35	100%
		37—Have actions with the community addressing the topic of corruption	3	8%	9	25%
Social Projects	J—ISO 19600, human rights policy, labor policy, social responsibility policy	38—Have a specific or systemic sponsorship practice for assistance entities in the municipality or region in which it operates	17	48%	34	98%

Source: Prepared by the authors from information/documents from the focal company.

Finally, the training sessions also favored the exchange of experiences and feedback between the focal company and its suppliers, triggering the creation of the “SDG priority matrix,” a document that lists the goals and objectives to be achieved for the advancement of the SDGs in the supply chain. To interviewee 1,

“Priority matrix presents the objectives and goals to be achieved by the company and its suppliers. If any goal is below expectations, we carry out an action plan together with our suppliers so that the objectives can be achieved.”

Figure 1 summarizes the entire evolution of the implementation of SDGs.

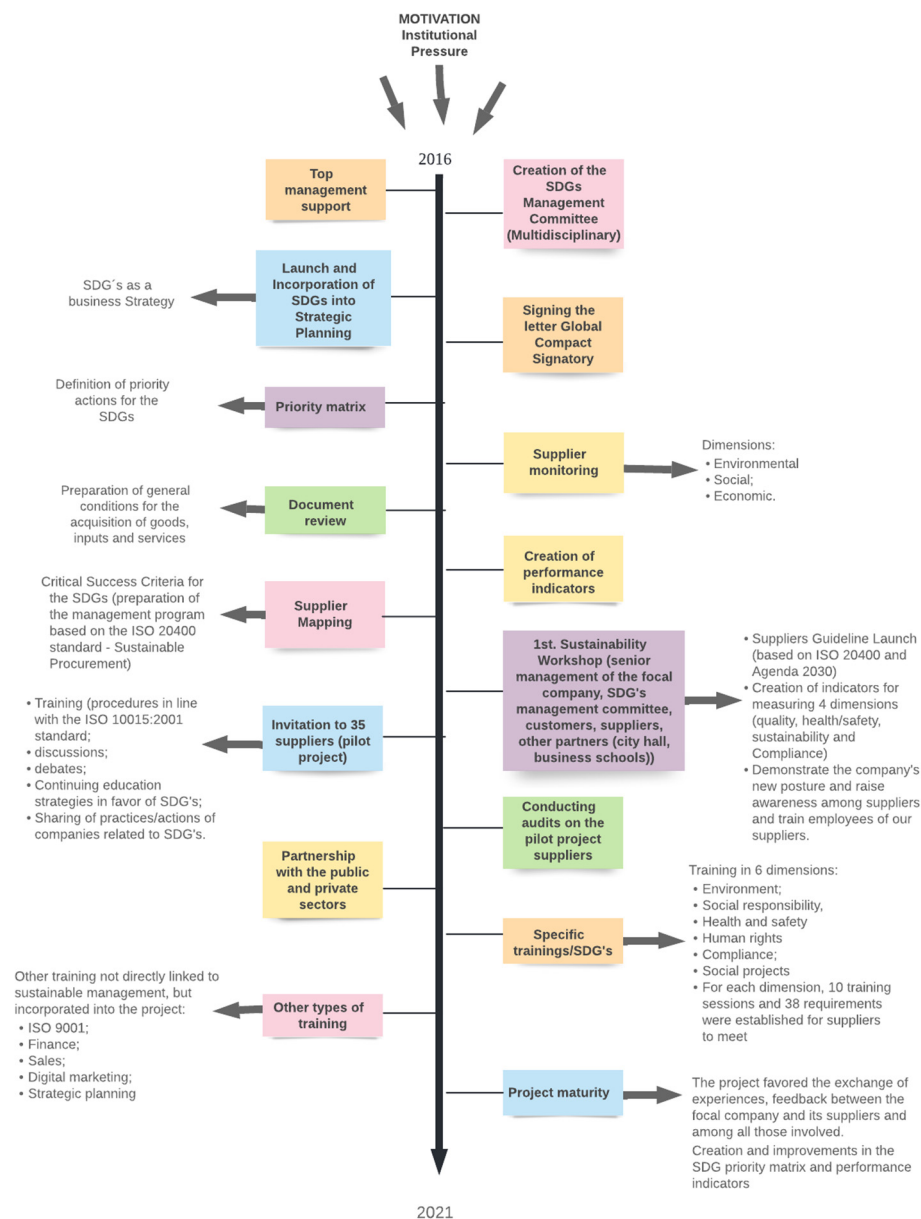


Figure 1. Evolution of the implementation of SDGs.

6. Discussion

Focal companies often manage their supply chain (or part thereof), design the end products and services offered, and maintain direct contact with customers. This way, such companies play a crucial role in sustainable development, as they promote SSCM triggers, manage the risks and performance of suppliers, and conduct supply chain management for sustainable products [71].

Thus, from our results, it is possible to make some important reflections on the implementation of SDGs in the focal company and in its supply chain. Firstly, we found that senior management appointed a management committee composed of a multidisciplinary team from different areas of the company. This committee was responsible at the beginning (and continues to be) for planning, executing, and directing the actions of the focal company toward to internal implementation and supply chain of the SDGs, demonstrating the importance of the top management support [72,73] and a multidisciplinary committee creation [72,74] to the SDGs advancement. This attitude is in conformance with the

specialized literature [75], as it involves various sectors of the organization, incorporating sustainability issues into the organizational structure.

This committee, together with senior management, was responsible for inserting sustainability-related issues into the company's strategic planning (see, e.g., [76,77]), including aspects of sustainability in the company's mission, vision, and values [78]. From this moment on, it is possible to see several actions that have been implemented, e.g., i. environmental, social, and economic dimensions suppliers monitoring, ii. priority matrix creation (checklist that would be the priority actions to be carried out for the SDGs advancement); iii. review of internal documents (procedures, work instructions, etc.), creation of new documents such as, for example, the general conditions for the acquisition of goods/materials/productive inputs, iv. creation of performance indicators to measure and monitor the effectiveness of implemented actions, v. mapping of critical success factors for the implementation of SDGs in suppliers with respective support, vi. elaboration of a management program for the supply chain based on ISO 20400—Sustainable Purchasing, vii. workshop, debates, training, viii. audits carried out on suppliers, and ix. the company becomes a signatory to the UN Global Compact.

Second, we can see that these actions and the awareness-raising and human resource-training actions are in line with the organizational theories, particularly with the resource-based view theory, in which the focal company is developing critical resources and abilities [25]; in this case, human resources seeking to align its HR strategies [27] in order to promote sustainability and the advancement of the SDGs. Furthermore, becoming a signatory to the UN Global Compact, the company starts aligning its strategies considering actions that contribute to combating various challenges facing humanity [69].

Third, it is important to report that the pressure exerted by the customer of this company for it to begin managing the SDGs is clear. This coercive pressure is explained by institutional theory, referred to as coercive isomorphic pressure [79,80]. We can also note (such as in the year 2016 when the company was pressured by a customer) institutional theory concepts in which the focal company, now in a reverse situation, pressures its dependents (suppliers) so that they will align their organizational practices with those of the focal company [79,80].

Fourth, as stipulated in the 2030 Agenda, having good management of the SDGs permeates the establishment of partnerships and global engagement at all levels and stakeholders, including public and private sector partnerships, engagement of governments, civil society, and various types of businesses and industries [21,81].

Finally, a considerable advance can be seen in all monitored dimensions. These results highlight the importance of training supply chain members in order to implement more advanced environmental management practices [3] and facilitate the transition to a more sustainable society [28]. In addition, they confirm that organizational learning [82], the alignment of human resources practices [83], and the focal company play a crucial role in the sustainability of organizations and effective SDG management [41,56].

7. Conclusions

This research presented a single case study at a focal company in the Brazilian electricity sector. Our aim was to identify which practices and strategies have been adopted by the focal company and its partners to implement the SDGs in the supply chain, a subject still little discussed in the literature. Studies of this nature bring a better conceptual understanding of stakeholder requirements and guide managers in choosing strategies and decision making that balance economic, social, and environmental viability in supply chains [84].

Thus, our work has important practical and theoretical implications that can contribute to the advancement of discussions on how to implement SDGs in supply chains by shedding light on how and which processes companies go through in view of the multiple requirements to identify, try, and potentially implement more sustainable company models [85], demonstrating the several directions for the management of focal companies and their supply chains that might be useful if adopted by other organizations.

For example, (i) we identified that the encouraging education, knowledge, and qualifications offered from the systematic application of training sessions by the focal company are bringing about worthwhile results for members of the supply chain, (ii) we evidence the relevant role of the focal company and the importance of training for implementing and advancing the SDGs, (iii) we present a robust set of training practices conducted in the supply chain by the focal company and its suppliers and the results achieved, iv. we demonstrate the importance of partnerships and how they facilitate sustainable management in the supply chains.

In addition, this study also contributes to the resource-based vision theory by demonstrating that well-trained/qualified employees are essential for the implementation and effective management dos SDGs.

This work, despite all precautions, has limitations. First, regarding the generalization of its results, as it is a single case study; second, our study focused on a single supply chain; and third, we did not consider the supply chain in its entirety. Thus, new studies in different national and international contexts in companies and supply chains (including comparative studies) would be useful and allow for new evidence, which could make it possible to better understand the several trends in SDG management in focal companies and their supply chains, disseminating knowledge that is vitally important to advancing in the fulfillment of the 2030 Agenda. We also suggest that new studies identify the main difficulties for the implementation of SDGs in supply chains and what actions and training are being offered to facilitate their implementation.

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Appendix A. Schedule 1: Interview Script

1. Company Characterization
 - 1.1. Founding date
 - 1.2. Brief company history
 - 1.3. Current number of employees
 - 1.4. Vision
 - 1.5. Mission
 - 1.6. Values
2. SDG Management Characterization
 - 2.1. How does the company see its relationship with SDG management? Is there an official document?
 - 2.2. Is SDG management inserted into the company's vision, mission, and values? In what way?

- 2.3. What was the date on which the company joined the Global Compact? After its adoption, have changes already been noticed in management?
- 2.4. What are the main motivations for adopting SDG management? (community pressure; customer pressure; incentives; others—try to list them in order of priority)
- 2.5. Briefly describe the history of SDG management at the company and the main important events. Try to mention the dates.
- 2.6. Have the practices adopted so far involved other entities, companies, and communities? Why? Mention the main ones.
- 2.7. How is SDG management incorporated into the organizational structure? (was a committee created, and was the company's organizational chart modified?)
- 2.8. How would you rate the company's performance in terms of meeting the SDGs?
- 2.9. What were (or are) the main challenges/difficulties in implementing the SDGs?
- 2.10. What were (or are) the main opportunities in implementing the SDGs? (what good it brings to the company, society/community, stakeholders, etc.).
3. SDG Training
 - 3.1. How does the company view the importance of SDG training to the signatories linked to it? How did this whole process start with its chain and community?
 - 3.2. How does the company survey its training needs, and how does it record its offering both internally and to its SDG partners?
 - 3.3. Who defines the content to be conveyed to signatories?
 - 3.4. Who within the company provides SDG training? How did those people acquire such knowledge?
 - 3.5. How does the company assess whether the training sessions carried out are having the desired effects?
 - 3.6. How did the company offer SDG training to its supply chain prior to joining the Global Compact?
 - 3.7. What were the training sessions offered within the company and to its supply chain?

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