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LEADERSHIP IN AGRIBUSINESS: IMPACT OF STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT ON RURAL PRODUCTIVITY

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to analyze the influence of leadership on the strategic management of rural properties and its impacts on productivity in Brazilian agribusiness. Considering the recent transformations in the sector, the research seeks to understand how the performance of the rural manager can be enhanced through the adoption of modern management practices, the use of digital technologies and the development of technical and behavioral skills. Aspects such as the importance of strategic planning, the challenges faced by leaders in the field, the use of management tools and the need for continuous training to adapt to the demands of an increasingly dynamic market were addressed. Based on a literature review, the study demonstrates that leadership, when aligned with well-defined strategies and supported by reasoned decisions, can significantly raise the levels of efficiency, sustainability and competitiveness of properties. It is concluded that the strengthening of rural leaders is essential for the future of agribusiness, contributing to a more structured, innovative and integrated sector with the economic, social and environmental demands of the twenty-first century.

Keywords: Rural Leadership. Strategic Management. Productivity. Agribusiness. Sustainability.

INTRODUCTION

Leadership in agribusiness is a strategic component for strengthening productive activities in rural areas, especially in the face of the transformations faced by the sector in recent decades, which require from managers not only technical knowledge, but also skills aimed at critical analysis, data-driven decision-making, and articulation between the various agents in the production chain. in increasingly complex and interdependent contexts (Egidio and Binotto, 2019).

The development of Brazilian agribusiness, consolidated as one of the pillars of the national economy, can no longer do without leadership practices that promote innovation, sustainability and competitiveness of production units, since the sector accounts for a significant portion of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), generates jobs and contributes to the surplus of the trade balance. which requires managerial postures capable of dealing with variables internal and external to the rural environment (Quintam and Assunção, 2019).

The growing complexity of agricultural operations, driven by the introduction of digital technologies, the expansion of environmental requirements and the pressure for greater economic efficiency, demands leaders with strategic planning skills, who know how to interpret market trends, integrate financial information, coordinate multidisciplinary teams and implement sustainable practices that ensure the long-term development of properties (Barros et al., 2019).

In this scenario, it is essential to understand the role of leadership as a structuring element in the strategic management of rural companies, especially considering the need to adapt to new market configurations, consumer demands for traceability and quality of products, and public policies aimed at agricultural production, which directly influence the operational dynamics of properties (Melo et al., 2019).

The general objective of this research is to analyze the impact of leadership in agribusiness, focusing on how strategic management contributes to the increase of rural productivity, considering the organizational, technological and economic dimensions that condition the performance of productive units, particularly in an increasingly volatile and competitive business environment (Leitner and Alves Filho, 2019).

As specific objectives, it is intended to identify the management practices most associated with the increase of productive efficiency, to examine the competencies required of rural leaders today and to discuss, based on the scientific literature, the future perspectives of leadership in agribusiness, especially about the incorporation of emerging technologies and the strengthening of sustainable policies in rural areas.

This study is justified by the social and economic relevance of agribusiness in Brazil and by the recognition that, in addition to favorable natural conditions, the performance of the sector depends on the quality of the management implemented in the properties, with leadership being a key variable for the success of rural enterprises, even more so in a context where the demand for profitability and socio-environmental responsibility becomes increasingly evident

The strengthening of rural management necessarily involves the training of producers and managers, who need to master analytical tools, develop relational skills and establish a systemic view of the business, integrating operational and strategic aspects in a cohesive way, which implies recognizing that leadership is not restricted to leadership positions, but rather to daily guidance practices, motivation, negotiation and decision-making.

The evolution of rural leadership in Brazil follows the transition from traditional models of conducting agricultural activities to more modern forms of organizing work and production, requiring managers to be able to dialogue with new paradigms, such as the use of big data, the internet of things, artificial intelligence, and sustainable management of natural resources, configuring a more technical profile that is adaptable to the demands of the twenty-first century.

Productivity in the field, although still linked to factors such as climate, soil and inputs, has been increasingly influenced by the efficiency of management processes, which makes leadership a strategic vector for achieving productive, economic and environmental goals, especially when it is exercised in a participatory, innovative and committed way to the principles of sustainability and territorial development (Melo et al., 2019).

The challenges faced by the Brazilian agricultural sector include, among others, limited access to credit, trade barriers, the need to comply with strict health and environmental standards, and the growing pressure for production with low ecological impact, with leadership being able to articulate technical and organizational responses to these demands, through strategies based on planning, Integrated Risk Control and Management.

In this sense, leadership is not only a desirable competency, but also a necessary condition for the modernization of agribusiness and the competitive insertion of rural properties in global markets, requiring managers not only to master traditional practices, but also to internalize an organizational culture based on innovation, efficiency, and responsibility (Quintam and Assunção, 2019).

The methodology adopted in this article consisted of a narrative literature review, with qualitative analysis of scientific articles selected based on criteria of relevance, timeliness and adequacy to the proposed theme, seeking to identify the authors' contributions regarding the relationships between leadership, strategic management and productivity in agribusiness, as well as to point out gaps and future perspectives for the deepening of the theme (Melo et al., 2019).

Thus, this article is structured in four main chapters, in addition to the introduction and final considerations, organized as follows: in the first chapter, the evolution of leadership in rural areas and the emergence of new managerial competencies will be discussed; the second will address management strategies and their influence on productivity indicators; the third will explore the technologies applied to rural management; Finally, the fourth chapter will bring a critical analysis of the challenges faced by leaders in contemporary agribusiness, pointing out possible paths for building a more effective and transformative leadership.

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT IN AGRIBUSINESS AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH PRODUCTIVITY

Strategic management applied to agribusiness has been decisive for the transformation of rural properties into sustainable and competitive business units, as it allows producers to understand the complexity of the agricultural environment, set specific goals, intelligently organize resources, and integrate processes that favor both increased productivity and the rational use of inputs. overcoming the old empirical methods still present in many realities of the field (Pozzobon, 2006).

With the advancement of market demands and the increase in economic and climate instability, managers need to develop skills that enable them to interpret financial, logistical, operational and human information in an articulated way, using these analyses as support to define strategies capable of minimizing risks and maximizing results, ensuring business continuity with solidity and adaptability (Barros et al., 2019).

The elaboration of medium and long-term planning, which considers factors such as costs, commodity prices, production seasonality and consumption trends, becomes a differential between producers who prosper and those who face recurrent operational difficulties, as technical knowledge alone is no longer sufficient to face the multifactorial challenges that involve the performance of properties (Melo et al., 2019).

The strategic manager must constantly seek efficiency, not only in production, but also in the use of human and financial resources, in time management and the relationship

with suppliers, financial institutions and marketing channels, recognizing that modern agribusiness requires systemic action and the construction of cooperation networks that enhance results through the exchange of information and logistics integration (Egidio and Binotto, 2019).

Among the resources available to improve productivity, digital control and monitoring tools stand out, such as management software, pest control applications, drones for aerial mapping, intelligent weather stations and production tracking systems, all these resources must be incorporated strategically, based on feasibility and return on investment analyses (Quintam and Assunção, 2019).

Strategic planning, to be effective, needs to include a detailed diagnosis of the property, identifying strengths and weaknesses, threats and opportunities, in addition to establishing clear performance indicators, which allow monitoring the evolution of the proposed goals and making course corrections promptly, preventing losses and promoting continuous improvements in processes (Barros et al., 2019).

The use of tools such as SWOT matrix, scenario analysis, budget plan, risk analysis and definition of SMART goals has been recommended by the specialized literature as viable ways to build an effective management model, as these methodologies help the producer to deal with market volatility and maintain the sustainability of production even in the face of adversity (Pozzobon, 2006).

One of the aspects that most impact productivity is efficient financial control, as the ability to map costs, evaluate profit margins, manage cash flow, and identify waste allows for better decisions regarding the use of inputs, investments in infrastructure, acquisition of equipment, and hiring of specialized labor, factors that directly influence the results of the harvest (Barros et al., 2019).

In addition to the organization of financial resources, the strategic manager must understand the importance of continuous training of the work team, promoting training, disseminating good practices, stimulating innovation and creating an environment of engagement, where each employee understands their role and actively collaborates to achieve the goals established by the property (Santos, 2019).

Properties that adopt organizational governance models, even in family structures, tend to have better productive performance and greater control over operational risks, as they can align decisions with the goals set, monitor results more accurately, and ensure the continuity of the company, regardless of generational or conjunctural changes (Melo et al., 2019).

The manager's technical knowledge needs to be expanded by skills in communication, negotiation, data analysis and institutional relationships, as decisions in the field increasingly impact or are impacted by public policies, exchange rate variations, trade agreements and environmental issues that require a proactive posture, open to dialogue and attentive to external dynamics (Quintam and Assunção, 2019).

Strategic management is also essential when planning land use, crop choice, crop rotation, implementation of agroforestry systems, or diversification of production, these choices being fundamental to preserve the soil, reduce pesticide costs, increase climate resilience, and ensure the continuous supply of food to different markets (Barros et al., 2019).

The connection between strategy and productivity can be observed in cases where the rural property, by aligning its mission, vision and objectives with modern management practices, achieves substantial gains in terms of efficiency, product quality, loss reduction, greater use of resources and, consequently, greater competitiveness against local and international competitors (Pozzobon, 2006).

Even in small properties, where resources are limited, strategic management makes it possible to transform limitations into opportunities, through the rationalization of processes, cooperation with other production units, the search for market niches and the addition of value to products, which increases the profit margin and favors the permanence of the producer in the agricultural activity with safety and autonomy (Melo et al., 2019).

Finally, it is reinforced that strategic management in agribusiness is not a fad or a practice restricted to large enterprises, but rather a structuring need for any producer who wishes to ensure productivity, longevity and relevance in the market, with active and informed leadership being the fundamental link between the planning and effective execution of actions inside and outside the gate (Egidio and Binotto, 2019).

TECHNOLOGIES APPLIED TO RURAL MANAGEMENT

The digital transformation in agribusiness has promoted a structural change in the way rural managers conduct their properties, requiring not only familiarity with the use of technological equipment, but also the ability to interpret data generated by sensors, software, and digital platforms, creating a new logic of decision-making based on evidence and no longer only on empirical experience (Egidio and Binotto, 2019).

The advancement of connectivity in rural areas has been crucial for the expansion of precision agriculture, since internet coverage on properties allows the integrated use of devices such as GPS, drones, weather sensors, and mapping software, which contribute to

real-time monitoring of crop conditions and production performance, favoring faster and more effective actions (Mondin and Tomé, 2019).

Among the most promising solutions for rural management, remote monitoring systems and platforms that integrate agronomic, climatic, economic and market information stand out, enabling managers to view data in an integrated way, which favors the development of strategies adapted to the reality of the property and the trends of the agricultural sector (Klerkx, Jakku and Labarthe, 2019).

The adoption of information technologies in the field has also driven the automation of operational processes, allowing for more precise control of irrigation, the localized application of pesticides and fertilizers, and the mapping of productive areas, contributing to a more efficient use of resources and the reduction of environmental impacts, in addition to significantly improving productivity rates (Bruzza et al., 2019).

The use of financial and accounting management software has provided a new approach in rural management, offering producers the possibility of controlling inflows and outflows more accurately, monitoring cash flow, projecting investments and analyzing the financial performance of the property based on accessible management reports updated in real time (Barros et al., 2019).

Another technology that has gained prominence in the agricultural environment is the use of satellite images and artificial intelligence for soil analysis, crop prediction and early detection of diseases, which allows producers to act in a preventive and not just corrective way, optimizing the use of inputs and reducing significant losses throughout the production cycle (Quintam and Assunção, 2019).

The strategic management of the property starts to incorporate the concept of smart rural establishments, in which there is integration between connected machines, analytical software and managerial decisions, promoting an environment where productivity is constantly monitored and adjusted based on data, overcoming the dependence on practices based only on intuition (Egidio and Binotto, 2019).

With the digitalization of the field, rural managers need to develop new skills related to the interpretation of reports generated by technological systems, in addition to knowing how to identify which tools are most appropriate to the reality of their property, taking into account the cost of implementation, the return on investment, and the team's ability to operate the adopted solutions (Mariyono et al., 2019).

The expansion of agtechs in Brazil has favored the offer of more accessible technological solutions, with specialized companies developing platforms aimed at the specific needs of small and medium-sized producers, expanding the possibilities of

innovation even in properties that do not have large financial resources or advanced infrastructure (Mondin and Tomé, 2019).

For technology to be effective in rural management, the producer must understand its operation, trusts the results generated, and is willing to change established routines based on the information collected, as resistance to innovation is still one of the main obstacles to digital transformation in the field, especially in regions where technical training is limited (Flamino and Borges, 2019).

Investment in technical training of workers and managers is essential for digital tools to be correctly interpreted and used, which requires a change in mentality that goes beyond the domain of machines and reaches the understanding that technology is a strategic ally in the planning, control and execution of agricultural activities (Becker, Severo and Guimarães, 2019).

Agriculture 4.0, based on automation, connectivity, and data analysis, requires an environment conducive to innovation, which includes everything from basic energy and internet infrastructure to the support of educational institutions, rural extension, and public policies that encourage the use of technologies and support producers in the transition to more efficient management models (Renzcherchen et al., 2019).

The construction of a digital culture in the field depends on leaders who understand the value of technology as an integral part of the production process, not as a cost, but as a necessary investment to increase competitiveness, product quality and environmental sustainability, creating a new vision of rural development based on data intelligence (Egidio and Binotto, 2019).

Technology, when well used, also favors access to differentiated markets, as it allows producers to prove sustainable practices, track their products, obtain certifications, and meet the increasingly stringent demands of national and international consumers, which represents an important competitive advantage in the current agribusiness scenario (Quintam and Assunção, 2019).

In short, rural management mediated by digital technologies represents a rupture with the traditional models of property management, requiring producers to have an active, curious and strategic posture in the face of tools that are constantly evolving, with the integration between technological innovation, professional training and managerial vision being the path to a more productive, profitable and sustainable agribusiness (Egidio and Binotto, 2019).

THE DIFFICULTIES OF LEADERSHIP IN CONTEMPORARY AGRIBUSINESS

Leadership in the agricultural sector faces increasingly complex challenges, as the diversity of property profiles, the advancement of technologies, changes in consumption patterns and the need to adapt to environmental and social criteria impose on the rural manager a versatile performance, capable of balancing productivity with responsibility, technique with people management, innovation with tradition and efficiency with sustainability (Melo et al., 2019).

One of the major obstacles still present in the rural environment is the difficulty in accessing quality information and continuing education, factors that limit the updating of leaders in the face of new market demands and end up maintaining outdated practices on properties that have productive potential, but are unable to innovate due to lack of technical or managerial preparation (Santos, 2019).

Resistance to cultural change, often rooted in management models based on empirical decisions or the centralization of activities in a single command figure, compromises the transition to more collaborative and data-driven models, which requires not only training, but also a process of awareness and openness to the new on the part of rural managers (Barros et al., 2019).

The shortage of qualified labor in rural regions is also one of the greatest difficulties for the exercise of effective leadership, as it is common to find properties that face the turnover of workers or the absence of professionals with technical and behavioral skills compatible with the demands of a productive environment in constant transformation (Egidio and Binotto, 2019).

The role of the rural leader requires knowledge about legal, environmental, financial, labor and logistical issues, in addition to the ability to dialogue with public and private institutions, cooperatives, suppliers and consumers, articulating different interests without losing focus on the objectives of the property, which reinforces the importance of multidisciplinary and adaptable leadership (Pozzobon, 2006).

The implementation of sustainable practices has required managers to change the productive mentality, no longer seeing environmental issues as barriers and starting to treat them as an integral part of the production strategy, which implies rethinking the use of land, water resources, chemical inputs and forms of waste disposal in a planned and conscious way (Melo et al., 2019).

The presence of different generations in charge of the properties, with different views on management, innovation, and decision-making, often generates internal conflicts that need to be mediated by skilled leaders, capable of preserving the family legacy without

compromising the evolution of the business, promoting the balance between experience and modernity (Santos, 2019).

An important challenge concerns time management, as rural managers need to deal with a multiplicity of functions ranging from production planning to relationships with financial institutions and regulatory bodies, which can generate overload and impair the ability to strategically evaluate day-to-day decisions (Barros et al., 2019).

Climate and environmental issues represent concrete risks to production, requiring leaders to take a preventive stance, with agricultural planning adapted to different scenarios, adequate rural insurance, crop diversification, and strategies that ensure the resilience of the property in the face of events such as droughts, frosts, floods, and pests (Quintam and Assunção, 2019).

About public policies, many producers face difficulties in accessing credit lines, innovation incentive programs or technical assistance, which limits their capacity for investment and renewal of the productive structure, and it is necessary for rural leaders to also act as an interlocutor between the property and the available institutional mechanisms (Egidio and Binotto, 2019).

The bureaucracy still present in many agribusiness administrative processes imposes barriers to management efficiency, especially in small and medium-sized properties, which often do not have specialized accounting or legal support, overloading the manager with operational demands that could be optimized with technical support and the use of automation tools (Santos, 2019).

Effective leadership requires the development of interpersonal skills such as active listening, negotiation, empathy, and conflict resolution, as the success of the property does not depend only on productivity per hectare or soil quality, but also on team engagement, balanced division of tasks, and recognition of collective effort (Barros et al., 2019).

Clear and transparent communication between manager and employees is essential for aligning goals and building a healthy work environment, in which each worker understands their role and feels part of the production process, reducing conflicts, increasing commitment, and improving the quality of deliveries (Egidio and Binotto, 2019).

The scarcity of female leaders in the sector is still a reality to be overcome, although many women already occupy command positions on properties and in institutions linked to agribusiness, breaking down cultural barriers and encouraging diversity in decision-making spaces are promising ways to increase the quality of management and value different ways of conducting rural business (Melo et al., 2019).

In the face of all these challenges, leadership in agribusiness needs to be seen as a continuous learning process, where the manager is willing to reinvent himself, to seek knowledge, to establish support networks and to recognize that the development of a property depends both on the strength of the land and on the capacity of those who lead it with strategic vision and commitment to the future.

PATHS TO TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP IN AGRIBUSINESS

The construction of transformative leadership in agribusiness involves the awareness that the role of the rural manager is not limited to the coordination of operational activities, but extends to the ability to inspire changes, generate knowledge, promote innovation and consolidate sustainable practices, and he must act as an agent of transformation both within the property and in the networks with which he interacts (Egidio and Binotto, 2019).

This new leadership demands a more strategic and flexible posture, in which the manager keeps up to date with technological, market and public policy trends, knowing how to adapt his property to local and global demands, understanding that success in the field is increasingly linked to the ability to anticipate scenarios and implement creative solutions with social and environmental responsibility (Barros et al., 2019).

Strengthening the technical and emotional skills of rural leaders is essential to face the challenges of the twenty-first century, and it is necessary for this professional to develop skills such as emotional intelligence, resilience, empathy, assertive communication, and systems thinking, which allow them to lead diverse teams, make decisions under pressure, and maintain balance in adverse contexts (Santos, 2019).

Encouraging continuing education is one of the most solid ways to develop transformative leadership, because through courses, seminars, exchanges and extension programs, producers can broaden their horizons, learn about successful practices, incorporate new technologies and share experiences, creating a solid basis for innovation and management improvement (Melo et al., 2019).

The articulation between producers, universities, research centers and public or private institutions has proven to be an effective strategy to disseminate good practices, promote access to scientific knowledge and facilitate the introduction of innovative solutions in the field, strengthening the ability of leaders to make informed and collaborative decisions, which contributes to regional development (Egidio and Binotto, 2019).

Transformative leadership also presupposes recognizing the potential of the property's employees, valuing their contributions, investing in their training, and promoting a participatory work environment, as shared management encourages commitment, improves

the organizational climate, and increases productivity, consolidating a culture of trust and cooperation (Santos, 2019).

Another important dimension of this leadership is the openness to the use of technologies that favor sustainability and traceability, such as environmental management software, systems for collecting and analyzing data on the use of water, soil and energy, as well as certifications that attest to the origin and production methods used, which adds value to the final product and expands the possibilities of access to differentiated markets (Quintam and Assunção, 2019).

Rural leaders must understand the role of innovation as a competitive advantage and not just as a short-term alternative, and it is necessary to develop an innovative mindset that encourages experimentation, learning from mistakes and the continuous search for improvements, integrating production processes with the principles of sustainability and economic efficiency (Barros et al., 2019).

The encouragement of planned family succession also contributes to the formation of new leaders, because by preparing future generations to take over the management of the property, the producer ensures the continuity of the business, preserves the accumulated knowledge and reduces the risks of disruptions in the production process, creating a more stable environment that is conducive to long-term innovation (Melo et al., 2019).

Communication between the manager and the different audiences with which he relates – from suppliers to banking institutions, cooperatives and regulatory bodies – needs to be clear, strategic and assertive, as a good institutional relationship opens doors, generates trust and facilitates access to credit, incentive programs and partnerships that can leverage the property's investment capacity (Pozzobon, 2006).

The use of technical, economic and environmental performance indicators allows leadership to have a more realistic view of the property, identifying bottlenecks, monitoring results and promoting adjustments when necessary, which reinforces the importance of professionalizing management as a structuring axis of a modern leadership oriented towards consistent and sustainable results (Egidio and Binotto, 2019).

Strategic planning, when associated with visionary leadership, expands the ability of rural properties to anticipate market movements, diversify their sources of income, reduce their vulnerability to climate and economic fluctuations, and establish a stronger competitive positioning, including in the international scenario (Quintam and Assunção, 2019).

The construction of collaborative networks among producers, whether through associations, cooperatives or groups for the exchange of experiences, enhances negotiating power, facilitates access to inputs and equipment and strengthens the

representativeness of the sector, allowing leadership to be exercised collectively and advances to occur in a more distributed way among the different actors in the field (Santos, 2019).

The humanization of management and attention to the mental health of managers and workers have gained space in discussions about leadership in agribusiness, as high levels of stress, geographic isolation and pressure for results can compromise quality of life and performance, making it necessary to promote a culture of care, balance and well-being within properties (Barros et al., 2019).

Therefore, consolidating transformative leadership in agribusiness requires a continuous process of learning, innovation, collaboration and openness to change, and the rural manager must understand that his performance influences not only the results of production, but also the development of the community, environmental preservation and the future of agricultural activity as a pillar of the economy and society.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The analysis of leadership in agribusiness and its relationship with the strategic management of rural productivity shows that the success of properties depends directly on the ability of their managers to act in a conscious, technical and adaptable way, understanding that the field, although traditionally marked by empirical practices, today demands a professionalized performance, capable of dealing with complex challenges and in constant transformation.

Throughout the work, it became clear that leading in the rural environment goes far beyond coordinating tasks or supervising workers, as it involves structural decisions that impact the economic, environmental, and social sustainability of the property, requiring managers to have skills that range from the use of technological tools to interpersonal skills, strategic planning, financial organization, and vision of the future.

The incorporation of technologies, combined with data-based management and clear goals, represents a necessary competitive advantage for producers who want to ensure stability and growth even in adverse scenarios, as it makes it possible not only to optimize resources and increase productivity, but also to build a sustainable rural business model. modern and in line with market demands.

The development of effective leadership in the field is directly linked to investment in continuing education, the expansion of access to information and the construction of cooperation networks, because only with technical preparation and institutional support will

it be possible to face historical barriers such as limited access to credit, the lack of qualified labor, climate instability and difficulties in accessing the market.

Transformative leadership, which sees the countryside as a space for innovation, responsibility and collective growth, emerges as the key to the future of Brazilian agribusiness, as it unites tradition and modernity in a strategic, conscious and human perspective, valuing the productive potential of the land without neglecting people, communities and the environment.

Thus, it is concluded that investing in prepared and strategically positioned rural leaders is investing not only in the individual success of properties, but in the construction of a more resilient, inclusive, competitive agribusiness committed to the sustainable development of the country.

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