Dialogism as a Technology in Socio-Environmental Project Management

Dialogia como Tecnologia na Gestão de Projetos Socioambientais

La dialogía como tecnología en la gestión de proyectos socioambientales

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Abstract: Immersed in an unprecedented multidimensional crisis, humanity faces the challenge of radically transforming the ways in which people relate to one another and to the environment, at the risk of extinction. In this context, addressing socio-environmental issues becomes a vital axis for envisioning a viable future for the planet. However, research on socio-environmental project management is still recent and not yet well consolidated. Consequently, the management of this type of project continues to face a number of interactional problems and often fails to address the multiple interests of the stakeholders involved in contexts that are almost always conflict-ridden. This research aims to propose dialogism as a management technology for socio-environmental projects. The research methodology is based on a conceptual and theoretical review integrating the field of dialogism with that of socio-environmental project management, as well as on multiple case studies. The findings open new avenues for rethinking the theorization and practice of socio-environmental project management from the perspective of dialogism.

Keywords: Environmental management, Socio-environmental projects, Dialogism.

Resumo: Mergulhada em uma crise inédita e de múltiplos aspectos, a humanidade está diante do desafio de transformar radicalmente as suas formas de interagir entre si e com o meio ambiente, sob pena de ser extinta. Nesse sentido, a resolução da questão socioambiental se torna, cada vez mais, um eixo fundamental para vislumbrar um futuro possível

para o planeta. No entanto, as pesquisas sobre a gestão de projetos socioambientais ainda são recentes e pouco consolidadas. Como consequência, a prática da gestão desse tipo de projeto ainda enfrenta vários problemas interacionais, muitas vezes sem conseguir atender aos múltiplos interesses dos atores envolvidos nos seus contextos, quase sempre conflituosos. O objetivo desta pesquisa é propor a dialogia como tecnologia de gestão para projetos socioambientais. A metodologia de pesquisa é baseada em uma revisão conceitual e teórica que integra o campo da dialogia com o da gestão de projetos socioambientais, bem como estudos de casos múltiplos. Os resultados da pesquisa abrem novos caminhos para repensar a teorização e a prática da gestão de projetos socioambientais sob a ótica da dialogia.

Palavras-chave: Gestão socioambiental, Projetos socioambientais, Dialogia.

Resumen: Inmersa en una crisis multidimensional sin precedentes, la humanidad enfrenta el desafío de transformar radicalmente las formas en que las personas se relacionan entre sí y con el medio ambiente, a riesgo de extinción. En este contexto, abordar las cuestiones socioambientales se convierte en un eje vital para imaginar un futuro viable para el planeta. Sin embargo, la investigación sobre la gestión de proyectos socioambientales es aún reciente y no está bien consolidada. En consecuencia, la gestión de este tipo de proyectos continúa enfrentando una serie de problemas de interacción y a menudo no logra atender los múltiples intereses de las partes interesadas involucradas en contextos que casi siempre están marcados por conflictos. Esta investigación tiene como objetivo proponer el dialogismo como una tecnología de gestión para proyectos socioambientales. La metodología de investigación se basa en una revisión conceptual y teórica que integra el campo del dialogismo con el de la gestión de proyectos socioambientales, así como en múltiples estudios de caso. Los hallazgos abren nuevas vías para repensar la teorización y la práctica de la gestión de proyectos socioambientales desde la perspectiva del dialogismo.

Palabras clave: Gestión socioambiental, Proyectos socioambientales, Dialogía.

Introduction

Environmental issues and social inequality, two of humanity's greatest challenges today, are problems that, when combined, structurally undermine development and quality of life (Boff, 2017; Lovelock, 2007; Dowbor, 2017; Susa, 2019). Faced with a crisis reflected in alarming environmental and social conditions, the need for effective short-term solutions is evident (OXFAM, 2016). In the search for means capable of promoting sustainable and democratic development, the implementation of socio-environmental projects presents itself as a possible path. These projects can positively affect local territorial development and to serve as a foundation for local public policies aligned with international guidelines, or even for the creation of collaborative citizen networks (Desmaison et al., 2019; Claghorn, Orsini, Restrepo, & Werthmann, 2016). Within this framework, socio-environmental project management is strategic for the future of humanity (Oxfam, 2016). Research on the management dimension, however, remains insufficient and fails to provide practical knowledge capable of addressing the multiple interests of the stakeholders involved.

The management of socio-environmental projects is a complex system of social interactions among various stakeholders, guided by shared objectives, standards, programs, strategies, methodologies, and information (Theodoro et al., 2004; Herrera et al., 2018). However, one of the greatest management challenges arises from the specific position of each of these stakeholders, given that their perspectives and interests regarding the territory vary considerably (Mercher, 2019; Pereira, 2011). Thus, we understand that the use of dialogism—understood as a distinct communication process aimed at collective learning—as a technological basis can contribute to rethinking and developing a

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more effective and efficient management approach. In this sense, this research proposes dialogism as a technology for managing socio-environmental projects in a way that considers and incorporates the interests and perspectives of as many territorial stakeholders as possible.

The research methodology employed here is based on a conceptual and theoretical review that integrates the field of dialogism with that of socio-environmental project management, as well as on multiple case studies. The cases help clarify dialogism in practice through a detailed examination of the specific characteristics of project contexts. The sources of information are documents (reports from each organization), direct observations, and interviews with managers and participants involved in 10 socio-environmental projects. The cases evaluated were carried out by three Brazilian organizations, distributed as follows: a university (Uni), responsible for implementing one project; a civil society organization (CSO), responsible for five projects; and a consulting firm (CFI), responsible for four projects. The themes addressed by the projects are permaculture, sustainability, green building, the solidarity economy, agroecology, and sanitation. For identification purposes, throughout the text the projects are labeled as follows, both to preserve their identity and to facilitate the reader's understanding: A-Uni; A-SCiv; B-SCiv; C-SCiv; D-SCiv; E-SCiv; A-Emp; B-Emp; C-Emp; and D-Emp. The empirical data were analyzed using a narrative analysis approach (Bastos & Biar, 2015; Maitlis, 2012; Riessman, 2008).

The findings of this research open new avenues for rethinking the theory and practice of socio-environmental project management from a dialogical perspective. Consequently, to support the work of socio-environmental project managers, the findings are presented as practical and professional knowledge—management techniques designed to assist managers in their day-to-day work on socio-environmental projects.

The interdisciplinary relevance of dialogism

Dialogism consists of both an approach and a mindset that invite individuals to engage in collective learning, encouraging them to reflect on processes of communication with themselves and with others (Isaacs, 2002). Thus, it is a tool for self-knowledge that facilitates an inner transformation in ways of thinking and feeling in order to foster constructive dialogues capable of transforming both individual and collective realities. Conceiving organizations as dialogical emphasizes their communicative aspects, exposes their diversity, highlights their symbolic potential, and calls for a dynamic view of these elements (Hatch & Ehrlich, 2002).
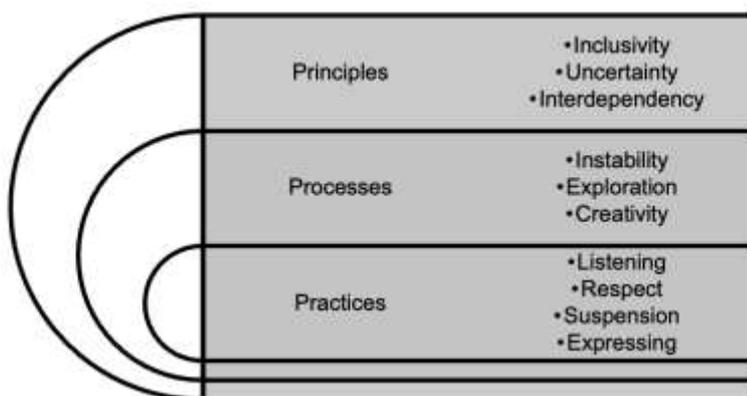
Socio-environmental projects involve a wide range of people, diverse interests, and many conflicts. It is important to recognize the origins of these conflicts, considering the construction of identity based on affinities and oppositions (Gergen & Barrett, 2002; Theodoro et al., 2004). In other words, it is important to facilitate a process through which each person recognizes and includes the wishes and needs of others while also reflecting on their own. Dialogic management contributes to this identification and, from there, to the construction of shared objectives—an invitation for new ideas to emerge from both the individual and collective unconscious (Isaacs, 2002). Dialogue, or dialogism, should be viewed as the methodology through which humanity can move forward together, even in the face of all the differences that characterize it.

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Dialogic management should be understood as an action-oriented methodology for project managers, in which dialogic approaches are manifested through ways of coordinating activities. It is a process that fosters the creation of environments that value creativity, sharing, and inclusion. For dialogic management, the systematization of processes and, above all, principles, is important for guiding practice. Practical experience points to the transformative power of dialogue. To develop a dialogical method, one must place at the heart of the approach the complexity of thought, but also the simplicity of action (Machado, 2016). With "a set of principles, guidelines and tools for speaking, silence and listening that contribute to broadening our perception of ourselves, others and our role in the world" (Machado, 2016, p. 24), it is possible to construct new realities in the subjective realm and to promote meaningful interventions in the physical realm.

When people feel involved and engaged, they are more likely to demonstrate new skills and competencies, as well as to contribute to the development of better dialogues (Isaacs, 2002; Machado, 2016). Dialogic thinking seeks to enhance creative processes within organizations by combining collective reflection with the practice of dialogic thought. Dialogic management refers to an ongoing process of dynamic communicative interaction. The sustainability of any project that bases its decision-making processes on dialogue presupposes an understanding that nothing is immutable.

Building on the literature on dialogism and on reflection regarding its application to socio-environmental management in a broad sense—whether in relation to projects or even organizations—the challenge addressed by this study is to propose a framework for managerial practice grounded in dialogism. Using as its methodological foundation practical experience in managing socio-environmental projects and organizations dealing with initiatives of this nature, while drawing on key authors in organizational management and dialogism, the framework proposed here is based on three fundamental aspects derived from dialogical theory: principles, processes, and practices (Figure 1).

Figure 1
A diagram illustrating the dialogic management of socio-environmental projects

Source: Authors (2023)

Principles

In the dialogical management of socio-environmental projects, the principles form the overarching framework because they encompass and guide both processes and practices. By incorporating the principles of the method into project management, it is possible to address the challenges posed by these processes and to establish clear guidelines for practice. The three principles of dialogism concern approaches to the other (inclusivity), to oneself (uncertainty), and to everyone together (interdependence).

The first principle, that of 'inclusivity,' responds to the challenge of taking multiple interests and perspectives into account. It involves a willingness to consider the reality of each stakeholder involved, based on that stakeholder's own position and experience. Inclusivity is expressed in dialogue through inclusive language, treating conflict itself as an element of learning and recognition (Machado, 2016). Even if the stakeholders do not demonstrate a predisposition toward inclusivity, the method unfolds into processes and practices that highlight the need to include multiple interests and perspectives in defining common objectives and constructing strategies to achieve them. When inclusivity is valued, the original interests of the parties can be considered, enabling the construction of new objectives and targets for the initiatives.

The second fundamental principle of the method is 'uncertainty.' At first glance, this word evokes the idea of doubt or a lack of certainty. However, in this context, uncertainty should be understood as a stance of suspending any form of absolute certainty constructed from an individual perspective. For dialogical management, uncertainty is fundamental because it guides individuals to let go of convictions that lead to inflexibility, thereby paving the way for the emergence of new possibilities. Whereas the principle of inclusivity addresses the need to include diverse points of view, uncertainty presents itself as the recognition that one's own perspective is merely one among many possible ones, and that reality is complex and arises from their conjunction. What each person takes to be the truth is merely one possibility and is therefore incomplete and uncertain (Machado, 2016).

The third principle, 'interdependence,' is the recognition that territory is the convergence of multiple truths. This principle embodies the notion of territorial unity, coexistence, and mutual recognition among all stakeholders, without denying the diversity among them. It stands in contrast to relationships of dependence and domination, which result respectively from the negation of oneself and of the other. Interdependence translates into an understanding of the capacity for coexistence, developing all the processes inherent to everyone on the basis of recognizing the existence and needs of the other (Machado, 2016). Incorporating this principle requires recognition that the individual perspective holds a place of equal importance alongside all others. It demands autonomy while also requiring responsibility toward oneself, toward the other, and toward the territory in all its complexity.

Processes

The dialogical management of socio-environmental projects is based on the recognition that a management process exists—understood here as synonymous with administration, coordination, and oversight—in which, in many respects, the positions and interests of certain stakeholders are prioritized at the expense of others, often intensifying territorial conflicts rather than resolving them.

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From the identification of this so-called 'traditional' process arises the need to create a different environment, based on specific techniques that enable dialogue to take place and thereby pave the way for the definition of the practices that follow.

A conversation can develop into a heated argument or a transformative dialogue, depending on some choices—whether conscious or not—and on the context in which it takes place. Dialogue itself tends to unfold through some phases, and the transition from one phase to another involves skillful choices and the resolution of certain crises, whether individual or collective (Isaacs, 2002).

The first phase of the dialogical process is characterized by 'instability,' which can be experienced in two distinct stages, each with its own specific challenges and opportunities. The first of these stages involves the initial contacts among all the stakeholders involved in the development of a given initiative. This initial challenge is marked by mistrust regarding both the approach itself and the other stakeholders operating in the area. However, any group of people or organizations that come together around a particular cause harbors within itself a desire for partnership; in other words, there is a predisposition toward resolving potential conflict. Nevertheless, in the initial phase of development, differences in paradigms are highly evident (Isaacs, 2002).

Once this initial phase has been overcome, participants in the emerging dialogical process commonly begin to argue among themselves; after all, the paradigm of absolute certainties still prevails, and they may not yet be willing to let go of beliefs that have been deeply ingrained for years (Isaacs, 2002). This crisis often results in difficulty accepting the ideas and needs of the other parties, creating a methodological need to encourage everyone involved to exercise, above all, the principle of uncertainty by publicly relinquishing their own points of view. At this stage, the aim is for the group to strive to find new rules of interaction and to discover, through dialogue, an alternative path to convergence. People and organizations develop a new language and new cognitive skills so that only then can they become a unified whole. It is important to identify collectively which perspective predominates in the construction of territorial reality and, based on this reflection, to highlight the need to construct a new one that encompasses as many perceptions as possible.

The second stage of the dialogical process is characterized by 'exploration.' This is the moment when participants become able to explore other ideas within the existing polarization while avoiding strategies that lead to the fragmentation of the group. Once the group absorbs this ability, it begins to experience a second, more acute moment of crisis, which can be described as collective suffering related to the way the group deals with the existing disconnection among the parties. The opportunity generated by this crisis lies in the impetus to deepen the exchange of experiences among the parties. Dialogic management invites individuals and organizations to live from the experience of the present, creating a space of opportunity for the construction of a new relationship based on new principles and values. It is important to make clear that the memory built up to that point was based on a different paradigm and to ensure that all stakeholders are willing to build a new reality from that point onward.

The third and final stage of the dialogical process concerns 'creativity,' when members begin to think in broader terms, with the principles of inclusivity, uncertainty, and interdependence already guiding their interactions. This is where the dialogic process succeeds, leading objectively to the collective construction of new dreams while also influencing the ways of thinking of everyone and every organization involved in the process (Isaacs, 2002).

Becoming aware of these phases and the elements present in each of them enables project

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managers to understand the dialogical management process and to work toward fostering an environment that supports it. The fundamental insight that emerges from this understanding is that the transformation that must occur through the dialogical process is based on deconstructing the beliefs and ways of thinking and acting inherent in individuals and organizations. The aim is to modify structures of perception and experience within the dialogical process and, once this is understood by the manager, it becomes possible to transform managerial practices so that they align with this model.

Practices

The practices of dialogic management of socio-environmental projects incorporate the guiding principles of the method and a comprehensive understanding of the dialogic process. Taken together, these dialogic practices foster a sense of integration within dialogue and provide the resilience needed to overcome moments of crisis, as well as the balance required to capitalize on opportunities (Isaacs, 1999). These practices can be organized into four sets of actions—listening, respecting, suspending, and expressing—and are analyzed in light of concrete experiences drawn from the narratives of the management processes of the socio-environmental projects under review.

The first set of practices concerns 'listening,' which is generally seen as an individual activity. From a dialogical perspective, it is the ability to listen collectively as an integral part of something larger, as the very principle of interdependence suggests. This shift in perspective requires individuals to consider how things appear from the standpoint of a network of relationships (Isaacs, 1999).

After several years of implementing the A-EmpC socio-environmental project and building a fruitful relationship among the stakeholders, technical problems in the operation of the funding organization had a direct impact on the community's well-being, which under other circumstances would certainly have led to a crisis. The consequences could have included delays in resolving the operational problem itself, the interruption of funding for community initiatives, or even jeopardizing the company's continued operations. Thanks to the good relationship built through the project, it was possible to organize a meeting among residents, local leaders, and company representatives to understand exactly which procedure was causing the problem and how to resolve it as quickly as possible.

It is important to realize that this type of solution becomes feasible once managers understand that project operations are possible only through good relations with the local community and through the community's understanding that the project's activities bring real benefits to the area. Through active listening, it was possible to move from a conflictual relationship to one based on respect and cooperation.

The second set of practices concerns mutual 'respect.' To deliberately create a space for people who hold differing views on the same subject, it is essential to learn to share through dialogue. Encouraging people and organizations to express their views respectfully can bring a previously untried quality to exchanges among the parties. Establishing this space requires all parties involved to keep it open to the introduction of new perspectives, whether these originate from the parties themselves or from the group. One of the greatest challenges a group may face in developing a dialogical experience is sustaining the tension that inevitably arises and refraining from reacting to it. Instinctively, when this type of situation occurs in a group, people begin to adopt those positions that,

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according to their perceptions, seem most correct or coherent. One of the collective skills necessary for the development of dialogue is maintaining respect for all perspectives (Isaacs, 1999). This set of practices relates directly to the principles of inclusivity and uncertainty, as it concerns the acceptance of existing multiplicity in its entirety, without favoring one perspective and excluding another.

An example of the practice of respect can be seen in a group exercise developed by the civil society organization studied here when establishing rules of conduct during the formation of groups. Among the various rules suggested, one that generally provokes opposition concerns the use of mobile phones during activities. To enhance the field experience, the ideal is for everyone to put their phones away and be fully engaged in the activity. However, objections often arise to justify the impossibility of complying with this requirement for personal reasons, such as a sick family member, the arrival of someone at the location, or even the need to photograph the activity for inclusion in subsequent reports. These situations are discussed within the group and respected, never leading to a weakening of the commitment to everyone's immersion in the activity.

The third set of practices concerns 'suspension,' that is, the art of letting go of certainties and gaining new perspectives. Here there is a very close connection with the principle of uncertainty, as it is an invitation to change direction, to pause, to retrace one's steps, and to view what is unfolding from a new perspective, without rigidity (Isaacs, 1999). Suspension invites us to set aside the temptation of security, problem-solving, and correction, insofar as our perspective is readjusted each time we observe what is unfolding, thereby creating new possibilities, paths, and alternatives for reality.

A concrete example that highlights the practice of suspension is the B-SCiv project. Initially designed around agroecology, the community's most pressing need proved to be the supply of drinking water. The management team was therefore faced with the challenge of setting aside all previous planning, reflecting more deeply on the local context, and adapting project implementation so that it would meet the community's needs. The team had to skillfully navigate the certainties established during the project's conception, set many of them aside, and devise a new strategy for action while continuing to meet the funding institution's requirements.

The fourth and final area of practice concerns the act of 'expressing.' Within the dialogical process, this act must stem from reflection on what needs to be expressed in that context. To do this, one must not only manage internal emotions, reactions, and impulses, but also have a clear understanding of the identity of the individual or organization (Isaacs, 1999). Failure in socio-environmental initiatives tends to occur because of a lack of effective and equitable communication among the various stakeholders involved, which interferes with the decision-making process (Gergen & Barrett, 2002). Although communication takes place through various tools, the creation of spaces for the verbalization of aspirations makes the expectations of all those involved more explicit and therefore promotes transparency in the processes.

In dialogues that flow powerfully, the words spoken align with the collective vision being created. There is a collective search for a new set of meanings and understandings. In truly transformative dialogue, people do not merely interact; they create together. To remain mindful of the challenge of expressing oneself toward a common center shared by all parties, it is necessary to allow a single voice from the group to emerge more quickly. People in groups usually sit in a circle so as to facilitate visualization of all the group's constituent parts and the nature of their interdependence. Despite the value placed on this perception of each part, the center remains the most important place.

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One example of this approach in socio-environmental project management is a technique used by the technical team at the consulting firm in the A-EmpC, B-EmpC, C-EmpC, and D-EmpC projects: a group exercise known as 'the tree of dreams.' Its aim is precisely to allow all members of the group to express how they feel about the territory at the present moment, what their dreams are for it in the long term, and what paths need to be taken to move beyond the current situation and achieve that dream. The activity facilitator records everything on a large board and, at the end, each participant can share their thoughts on the collective output. From that moment on, the tree of dreams represents the collective dream, standing at the center of the group and reflecting each individual's perspective.

The process of dialogic management of socio-environmental projects

The proposal for a dialogical management approach focused on socio-environmental projects involves adopting dialogism as the methodological foundation for managerial practice at every stage. The approach proposed here combines the values underpinning dialogism—systematized by the 3 Ps (dialogical principles, processes, and practices)—to perform a specific set of activities and overcome challenges. The 3 Ps complement one another. While the principles cut across all activities and the processes form part of a broader understanding of how dialogical management should operate, the practices are more specific and exhibit particular characteristics depending on each activity to be carried out.

The activities involved in conducting a socio-environmental project can vary. Because research that explores and presents a practical and in-depth framework for the management of socio-environmental projects is limited, we combined the few existing studies with research on project management (Gray & Larson, 2009; Gido & Clements, 2011) to develop a methodology consistent both in terms of management and in its dialogical dimension. Seven activities stand out as central throughout the process of dialogic management of socio-environmental projects (Figure 2).

Figure 2
Timeline for the implementation of a socio-environmental project
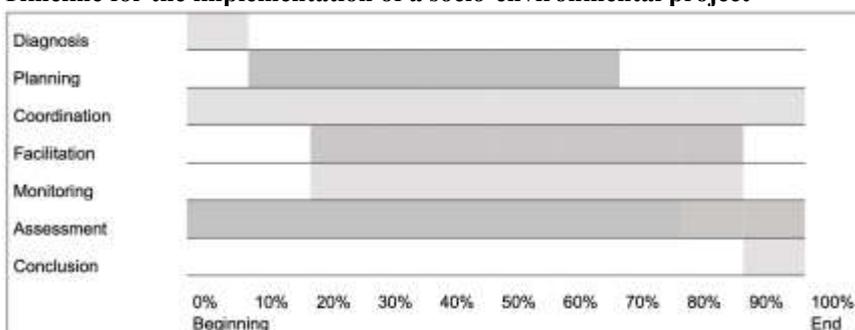
Source: Authors (2023)

Socio-environmental diagnosis

The socio-environmental diagnosis is guided by three key actions: (a) understanding the nature and motivations of the funding institution; (b) identifying the most active and influential stakeholders

in the area; and (c) identifying the area's vulnerabilities and potential (Gray & Larson, 2009). The challenge here is to understand aspects that go beyond the collection of objectives, observable data and that are decisive in shaping relationships among the stakeholders. It is important that the manager convey, through discourse and action, the essence of these principles: inclusivity in information gathering, encompassing multiple perspectives; uncertainty in recognizing that stakeholders' perspectives are diverse; and interdependence in the effort to develop a territorial profile that considers all possible perspectives, ensuring that this concept is effectively communicated to all.

The first step involves identifying the nature and motivations of the funding body, which influence the progress of all other activities. If the funding body is a public institution, there tends to be a high degree of rigor regarding implementation details, as well as little flexibility with respect to project scope. However, direct contact with the public sector increases the potential to influence public policy. With this type of funder, one of the greatest challenges is securing the minimum structures required to ensure that what is important can be expressed, given that communication is often subject to formal and specific procedures that are frequently impersonal and indirect.

In the case of private funding, there is room for flexibility in adapting project scope and less detailed financial reporting. On the other hand, there is greater instability in the contractual relationship, and in many situations it is necessary to challenge the notion that the manager is a direct representative of the funding institution's interests, which can make it difficult to build credibility and trust within the community. It is essential to practice dialogical listening, that is, a mode in which the manager and the organization see themselves as stakeholders working together to overcome the same challenge.

The A-SCiv and B-SCiv projects, both funded by public banks, were approved on the basis of a predefined scope of highly specific activities. As the projects progressed, both required changes to their scope, whether in terms of the activities initially proposed or of the materials and equipment requested. Because of the public nature of the funding, this process was extremely bureaucratic and difficult for the project managers:

> The area in which we were working as part of the [B-SCiv project] is highly dynamic, and we tried to perform initiatives that would have the greatest possible impact on the community's most pressing needs. Over the months, other factors came into play that had not been considered when the project was first conceived, which is to be expected in such a dynamic environment. Adapting to the bank was a slow and difficult process, which even strained the team's relationship with the community. How could we explain that the bank was responsible for the delays when we were the only project representatives on the ground? (B-SCiv Project Manager).

Furthermore, the A-SCiv project had the opportunity to present its findings to representatives from other localities and to engage in the public policy debate concerning a specific type of development. In this respect, the public nature of the investment ensured greater visibility and paved the way for discussions between local representatives and municipal authorities, drawing attention to the area's most basic needs.

The second step in the socio-environmental diagnosis is to identify the most active and influential stakeholders in the area. This stage enables the project team to establish relationships with local individuals and organizations, should such links not already exist. It is the project manager who, at this stage, takes on the role of project representative, assuming responsibility for providing clarification

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and establishing an easily accessible channel of communication. For example, in the A-SCiv project, which focused on solid waste management by highlighting the work carried out by local residents who collect recyclable materials, the initial challenge was to identify the waste pickers, local leaders, and residents interested in environmental issues, a task carried out with the support of organizations already active in the area.

> The arrival of a team working on a new project in an area like this, where urban violence is a daily reality and the state is present mainly through oppressive force, naturally arouses mistrust among the local population. It is not safe for me or my team to arrive here unaccompanied. The first place we went was the local school, and from there we came to know local leaders who allowed us to enter the community safely and, above all, under the guidance of a local representative (A-SCiv Project Manager).

The third initiative seeks to identify the vulnerabilities and potential of the area through a territorial contextualization process that should be based on inclusive and participatory activities rather than focusing solely on technical aspects. Instead, efforts should be made to address the identity dynamics of the stakeholders to identify as many expectations as possible. The A-Uni project, as part of a broad set of social management strategies, developed a community mapping and socio-territorial contextualization activity that served as an approach to the territory and the social capital of a defined area. This initiative, which required the participation of the local community and other key stakeholders, such as academia and other civil society organizations, enabled recognition of the region's potential and limitations. From then on, a common platform was created in which the exchange of ideas and interactions of the most diverse kinds became possible.

Planning

This activity follows the diagnostic phase. On the project timeline, planning is scheduled to take place after diagnosis and throughout the facilitation, monitoring, and evaluation period. However, it may be revisited as often as necessary throughout the project, depending on the context. Planning involves the following actions: (a) defining the project's objective; (b) determining and dividing the scope; and (c) effectively communicating the baseline plan to the stakeholders involved (Gido & Clements, 2011). It is the manager's responsibility to propose an inclusive scope that considers all stakeholders involved in the diagnostic phase. The result is a baseline plan that should be clear to the funder, practical for the technical team, and accessible to the other stakeholders.

The first step is to define the project's objective. The challenge here is to identify common ground among the stakeholders and incorporate it into the objective. For example, in the A-EmpC project, the private company providing the funding wished to build a positive relationship with the community surrounding its operational plant. A consulting firm was hired to perform a socio-environmental diagnosis and, based on that diagnosis, to design a project that sought to meet local needs while building a positive image of the enterprise among residents.

The second step involves defining and dividing the project scope into work packages. This division can be carried out by identifying specific areas of action or on a chronological basis, but each package must define its scope, responsible parties, and timeline. In the E-SCiv project, for example, a river's riparian forest was restored through agroecological measures. The project was divided between technical restoration work and the provision of technical assistance to farming families in the region.

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Although these actions were linked in the final outcome, there were specific teams and defined scopes for each of them. The challenge for the manager here is not to lose sight of the progress of either one and to ensure the connection between them.

The third action focuses on communicating the plan to all stakeholders in an appropriate manner. The principle of inclusivity is paramount here, as it is essential to include all stakeholders in the communication process while respecting their specific circumstances. The funding body will require the plan to be presented in a specific, more formal format. Meanwhile, the stakeholders affected by the project's activities should have access to a more accessible format. When analyzing the set of projects undertaken by the SCiv organization (A-SCiv; B-SCiv; C-SCiv; D-SCiv; and E-SCiv), it is evident that because it works primarily with public funders, it must present in advance a consolidated and detailed scope of the actions to be carried out, while also seeking to create, in collaboration with the communities, tools that make clear to everyone what activities will be undertaken.

Coordination

The role of coordination involves three key activities: (a) managing activities; (b) leading; and (c) forging links among the various stakeholders (Gray & Larson, 2009). This role spans the entire timeline; after all, it is the manager's responsibility to establish relationships among all stakeholders involved, a process that continues from start to finish. One of the keys to effective coordination is building cooperative relationships; after all, the success of dialogic management depends on the relationships established among all parties and on the outcomes generated by them.

To coordinate activities based on the principles of dialogic management, the manager's main challenge is to extend these dialogic principles to other stakeholders. Inclusivity is achieved by developing strategies to ensure everyone's participation in decision-making processes. Uncertainty is present insofar as the manager mediates and guides the project but never dictates it in accordance with personal beliefs. Finally, interdependence manifests itself when the manager positions themself as an active participant within the organization and understands that each individual plays a decisive role in achieving the objectives. The manager cannot merely focus on managerial issues but must also exercise leadership. This involves recognizing the role and needs of everyone and being able to alter the direction of the project, if necessary, while aligning and motivating all parties to work together.

The role of coordination also involves establishing a network of relationships among stakeholders, in which the manager plays a central role. A good project manager strives to ensure that these healthy relationships continue even in their absence or once the project has been completed. It is the project team that manages, facilitates, and carries out most of the planned activities. It is natural that, even while wanting to do a good job, many team members tend to worry about their other obligations and about how their involvement in the project will contribute to their personal aspirations and goals (Gido & Clements, 2011). The manager must remain attentive and do their utmost to avoid creating an environment of competition, whether over resources or support. On the contrary, it is desirable for the team always to share resources and exchange information on the project's many nuances.

Two of the projects evaluated serve as benchmarks for the formation of an effective cooperative network catalyzed by coordination activities. The first is B-EmpC, which operates in a community funded by a local company. It succeeded in creating a network of collaboration among students and

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staff at a state school and local residents for the upkeep of a community garden. Another example is the D-SCiv project, which worked in the semiarid region of Bahia using agroecology, but which later branched out into two further projects thanks to the formation of a collaborative network among farmers, processors, and educators in the region.

Dialogic management emphasizes dialogue among stakeholders and the anticipation of change as key activities. This requires managers to be able to understand the dialogic process, address concerns and anxieties, support the project at all levels, identify problems quickly, and uphold the integrity of the project and the common goal agreed upon by all.

Facilitation and monitoring

In the timeline of a socio-environmental project, facilitation and monitoring go hand in hand, even though they are distinct activities. Whereas the former concerns the actual implementation of activities, monitoring involves their observation, recording, and oversight. These two activities involve the following actions: (a) preparing and acquiring materials and equipment; (b) mobilizing the community; (c) facilitating the activity; and (d) monitoring and reporting (Gray & Larson, 2009). The first two actions relate to preparation and organization. The latter two must be carried out throughout implementation, and the data and information gathered during monitoring must be systematized in a predetermined format at the end of the activity.

The dialogical principle of interdependence should be emphasized here, particularly with regard to the project team. Facilitation and monitoring are not tasks that should be carried out directly by the manager. Direct involvement in specific activities causes the manager to lose sight of the project's broader perspective. A good manager is not one who is an authority in every field, but rather one who exercises leadership and influence to manage a broader and more complex set of interfaces. Those responsible for execution must perform all operational tasks, such as logistical procedures, procurement of materials, and mobilization. For this to run smoothly, the manager needs to keep a close eye on the activity schedule. It is important that implementation be communicated through quick, simple, and effective tools, as this makes it possible to identify the need for changes in the project's direction.

Because the A-EmpC, B-EmpC, and C-EmpC projects are carried out simultaneously in different locations by a single organization, they rely on a team of facilitators for a variety of activities. In this case, the company established a system in which all three schedules were synchronized, making visualization easier and enabling the creation of a rotation schedule, thereby avoiding clashes among the projects.

To guide the monitoring process, it is important to establish indicators related to the variables of interest. The monitoring process should provide data for these indicators, although this does not relieve the implementing team of the need to remain vigilant regarding unexpected developments. A regular reporting schedule must be established to provide the data and information gathered through monitoring; this may be done on an activity-by-activity basis or over a period covering some activities or a specific objective. It is advisable to provide activity reports to all project stakeholders, while naturally respecting the specific nature of each audience.

EmpC, for example, has adopted a strategy of creating groups on messaging apps to share

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information about the activities carried out by its projects. In addition to serving as a widely accessible channel for social accountability, these spaces can mobilize individuals and to share the achievements of each stakeholder throughout the project. Managers need to apply the principle of interdependence by delegating and trusting the team while exercising leadership and control in a broad and influential manner.

Assessment

Evaluation must be informed by the information gathered during the project cycle. Whereas monitoring tracks the progress of activities and constitutes a data-collection exercise, evaluation is the process of assigning value to those activities, giving them meaning, and deriving guidance for decision-making. This activity may take place at different stages of the socio-environmental project and, at each of these stages, undergoes changes in its dynamics, nature, and purposes. Indeed, evaluating results from a dialogical perspective encompasses actions such as: (a) diagnostic evaluation; (b) process evaluation; (c) outcome evaluation; and (d) impact evaluation (Gray & Larson, 2009).

The first step involves a socio-environmental diagnosis. Based on this assessment, it is possible to devise intervention strategies, test hypotheses, identify priorities, and set targets. In addition to financial costs, it is important to consider the social, political, and environmental costs of a project still at the planning stage. This factor will guide the nature of the intervention itself. The second step—process evaluation—is carried out during the facilitation phase. Here, both the definitions established during planning and the evidence gathered during implementation are considered. However, this stage tends to depend directly on the information gathered during monitoring and is adaptive in nature.

The third step—outcome evaluation—aims to ascertain the extent to which the planned intervention has achieved the desired effect. These evaluations seek to answer questions regarding the sustainability and replicability of the project in question. Impact evaluation—the fourth step—is the most complex of all, as it involves a range of information that is not always readily available. It focuses on the transformations that have taken place and is not restricted to immediate results; on the contrary, it seeks to identify more structural outcomes. This evaluation is fundamental for developing arguments that consolidate the implementation of socio-environmental projects as a tool for social transformation, but in most cases the limitations of teams in carrying it out must also be recognized.

In terms of dialogical principles, inclusivity is manifested in the consideration of all stakeholders' perspectives within the evaluation process; uncertainty, in the evaluator's neutrality, in the suspension of any certainty, and in the careful consideration of the information gathered; and interdependence, in the horizontal nature of the process and in the creation of environments conducive to expression, thereby fostering a comprehensive evaluative overview of the territory. In summary, evaluation in the context of the dialogical management of socio-environmental projects must take place continuously, adopting different strategies and objectives as the project develops. Dialogical principles must accompany the evaluation process. The manager's role must be direct insofar as they lead the process, making it as horizontal and agile as possible.

Conclusion

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The project concludes immediately after the completion of the facilitation and monitoring phase and involves the following actions: (a) verification of agreed deliverables; (b) internal assessment of performance and learning; and (c) a celebratory event. The aim of concluding the project properly is to absorb the lessons learned in order to improve performance in future initiatives (Gido & Clements, 2011). This is the ideal moment to reaffirm dialogical principles and reinforce them as fundamental to the autonomous continuation of actions by the manager and the implementing team. It is natural that, within the dialogic process, the stage of creativity has already been reached and that new ideas and expressions of intent are emerging.

The first step is to review all scheduled deliverables, including not only fieldwork but also the preparation of reports, communication materials, training booklets, promotional videos, and other items. The implementing organization must ensure that all project-related documentation is properly organized and archived so that it can be retrieved for future use. The second step, conducting an internal evaluation, requires the manager to meet with each member of the implementing team, provide feedback on that person's contribution, and remain open to hearing the individual's assessment of their own performance. It is also desirable that, at the end of the cycle, a general meeting be held for a coordinated presentation of the results and a joint evaluation. The third step, celebration, although often overlooked by organizations, is very important for those involved in the project. In addition to helping build positive emotional memories, it is a time to rally support, including that of the funder, for the continuation of the actions.

Project closure must be considered from the planning stage onward. A complete project cycle should not be considered finished simply because the scope of the actions has been completed, but rather when all stakeholders involved recognize the end of one cycle and look forward to the start of a new one, regardless of whether the project still formally exists or whether the management team is physically present on the ground.

Discussion and conclusion

The proliferation of socio-environmental projects is a strategy for addressing the global economic and social crisis. However, the scarcity of studies on the specific management of this type of project creates an uncertain environment for project managers. The dialogical management approach for socio-environmental projects proposed here aims to fill this gap and pave the way for the implementation of further initiatives of this nature with greater robustness and a stronger foundation.

From the perspective of dialogism, the involvement of various stakeholders—including those who have a decisive impact on the environment — can mobilize and bring together all members of society, including communities, civil society organizations, public authorities, and businesses, among others, in order to find a joint solution. It is hoped that, by incorporating the 3 Ps (principles, processes, and practices of dialogism) into the strategies proposed here, it will be possible to influence even the structures of the organizations themselves, since dialogism invites them not only to interact and consider the aspirations and needs of other stakeholders, but also to adapt and transform internally as a result. The main objective is for the organizations created or fostered by the project to become

stronger and to generate mechanisms of self-management and self-regulation, always in pursuit of sustainability and autonomy.

The dialogical management approach to socio-environmental projects proposed here aims to become a benchmark capable of instilling values and procedures into managers' daily practice. The challenge of dealing with different social stakeholders is arduous and requires skill and creativity, regardless of whether the content of this work is applied. However, grounding one's approach in dialogue and setting goals based on the principles advocated here will certainly make this professional's challenging work considerably easier. This relationship between dialogue and the management of socio-environmental projects can create a tool to guide managers' work, but also to consolidate these initiatives as genuine alternatives for environmental and social transformation, which are so urgently needed in the current context.

Overcoming the socio-environmental challenges of our time is part of our mission as the human generation inhabiting this planet. This work aims to contribute to this cause by serving as a guiding tool that various managers and stakeholders can use to have a positive impact on their local areas and organizations. Furthermore, this work may also serve as a reference for further research that explores aspects of management in socio-environmental projects in greater depth.

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