THE SUSTAINABILITY OF THE COMPANY:

FROM THE MANAGEMENT OF THE STAKEHOLDERS TO THE MANAGEMENT OF THE PARADOXES

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Abstract:

Since the publication of the Brundtland report "Our Common Future" in 1987, researchers in management sciences, particularly those in the business and society field, wanted to propose conceptions reconciling the environment, the social and the company performance. Therefore, the theoretical and empirical researches were much oriented towards promoting the idea of a possible convergence between the three dimensions of sustainable development. The stakeholder theory through its normative and instrumental dimensions was in the most this work the theoretical "shelter" to legitimate and defend this thesis. However, unlike displayed wishes, sustainability complexity emerges and imposes itself progressively. Especially after the year 2010, empirical researches recognize, increasingly, the existence of contradictions, tensions and paradox related to the corporate sustainability. This paradoxical aspect of sustainability is usually hidden in the line of traditional research. A position that needs to be revisited.

In our view, this position is explained by the extensive researchers use of the stakeholder theory, the foundations of which are silent, or at least do not adequately treat the obvious opposition of the interests of stakeholders. To help fill this gap, this theoretical communication, is part of a conceptual movement "paradoxical" already underway and proposes a conceptual shift to the paradox theory as a promising new theoretical perspective for understanding the corporate sustainability. By relying on the limits of the conceptual framework provided by the stakeholder theory.

Résumé:

Depuis la publication du rapport de Brundtland « *notre avenir à tous* » en 1987, les chercheurs en sciences de gestion, et plus particulièrement ceux du champ *business and society*, voulaient proposer des conceptions réconciliant l'environnement, le social et la performance de l'entreprise. De ce fait, les recherches théoriques et empiriques étaient beaucoup orientées vers la promotion de l'idée d'une convergence possible entre les trois dimensions du développement durable. La théorie des parties prenantes à travers ses dimensions normative et instrumentale était dans la plupart de ces travaux l'«abri» théorique pour légitimer et défendre cette thèse. Cependant, contrairement aux souhaits affichés, la complexité de la durabilité émerge et s'impose progressivement. Surtout après l'an 2010, les recherches empiriques reconnaissent, de plus en plus, l'existence des contradictions, tensions et paradoxes liées à la durabilité de l'entreprise. Cette facette paradoxale de la durabilité est généralement occultée dans la ligne de recherche traditionnelle. Une position qui doit être revisitée.

À notre sens, cette position s'explique par le recours massif des chercheurs à la théorie des parties prenantes, dont les fondements sont silencieux, ou du moins, ne traitent pas suffisamment l'opposition évidente des intérêts des parties prenantes. Pour contribuer à combler cette lacune, cette communication théorique, s'inscrit dans un mouvement conceptuel « paradoxal» déjà en cours et propose un glissement conceptuel vers la théorie du paradoxe comme une nouvelle perspective théorique prometteuse pour la compréhension de la durabilité de l'entreprise. En s'appuyant sur les limites du cadre conceptuel offert par la théorie des parties prenantes.

Mots clés : La durabilité, les tensions, la théorie des parties prenantes, la théorie du paradoxe.

Introduction

Since the emergence of the concept of sustainable development in the Brundtland report in 1987, the sustainability of the company has become increasingly popular among management scientists. This enthusiasm has resulted in an increase in scientific work. However, despite the importance of publications on questions related to the sustainability of companies, we note that there are still many divergences, especially on the nature of the link between the economic dimension of one side and the social and environmental dimension on the other side. The lack of consensus on a rather urgent and important topic, perhaps first raised in the empirical results, but which, in our opinion, has a theoretical explanation. The theoretical frameworks to which researchers refer to understand the possible links between economic, environmental and social in the organizational context are numerous and diverse. Without pretending to be exhaustive, we can cite stakeholder theory, neo-institutional theory, Porter's and Kramer's strategic approach and entrepreneurial theory. However, stakeholder theory remains predominant.

In fact, the transition from one theoretical framework to another was accompanied by a conceptual evolution of the relationship between the three major dimensions of sustainability. From the classical approach that conceives environmental and social issues as constraints and costs that threaten the sustainability of organizations to the entrepreneurial approach that conceives these elements as a source of entrepreneurial opportunities. Passing by Porter's hypothesis according to which, green investment contributes in improving the competitiveness and performance of companies (Porter and Van Der Linde, 1995).

Through these conceptual evolutions, researchers in management sciences wanted to propose concepts reconciling the environment, the social and the performance of the company. In this regard, their reflections were in fact over-dominated by the criticism of CSR's Milton Friedman (1970), when he said that the only responsibility of managers is to maximize shareholders' profits. The concern to prove the opposite was omnipresent among researchers in management science and it was translated into conceptual and empirical literature. As a conceptual example, we can cite the proposition and the popularization of the concepts of global performance and sustainable performance, and as an empirical example, the many empirical tests of the relation between social or environmental performance and financial or economic performance (for example: McWilliams and Siegel 2000) in different contexts.

This quest by researchers for the legitimacy of environmental and societal issues, which are not sufficiently known in the corporate world, has passed through the economic door, and consequently eclipsed other facets of sustainability. Afterwards, the framework agreement of the Paris COP 21, which was a strong sign of a global awareness of the urgency of environmental issues. It seems to us that it is time to revisit this dominant thesis of sustainable development, based on the possible reconciliation between the three dimensions and theoretically founded in management sciences on stakeholder theory, especially in its instrumental dimension.

The concept of business sustainability generally covers "*the firm's ability to manage its triple bottom line-in other words, its environmental, social, and economic goals*" (Slawinski and Bansal, 2015, p: 2). It is based on the idea that the company has a multidimensional responsibility affecting the economic, environmental, and social spheres. In practice, these domains do not harmonize spontaneously, which makes sustainable development generally

appear like a utopia (Capron and Quairel 2006). The "collision" zones between these domains oblige managers to respond to often conflicting interests and to make arbitrations and compromises (Capron and Quairel 2004).

Since the early 2000s, the tensions of sustainability have begun to appear in the literature, especially Anglo-Saxon literature. Thus, researchers are increasingly calling for the contradictions that arise mainly from stakeholders interests divergences. Daudigeos and Valiorgue (2010) observe that the relationship between CSR and the creation of market value is complex, if not uncertain, due, in particular, to the restrictive conditions for cost-effective management of external effects. In the same way, Grimand Amaury and al. (2014) argue that the deployment of a CSR approach is a process of multiple contradictions that the organizational actors must manage, and add that researchers often resort to "umbrella" constructs such as the societal performance of the company which marks a tendency to occult the tensions and paradoxes that cross the field of CSR instead of explicitly recognizing them.

This new trend in the literature on the sustainability of the company is the product of empirical rather inductive studies, which closely observe the constraints faced by managers. Vilanova and al. (2009) capture one of these constraints and indicate that "*CSR in practice consists of managing inherent paradoxes generated by the tension between CSR and business policies*" (p.57). These authors and others challenge us in relation to a facet of sustainability of the company little illuminated in the literature. The facet of tensions, contradictions and paradoxes linked to the integration of social and environmental issues in the company, which are forgotten and sometimes occulted in this area of research.

The complexity of the corporate sustainability is gradually imposed and requires the use of alternative theoretical frameworks or at least additional to those that are old, if not classic. In this orientation, the crossing of the literature on organizational tensions and paradoxes (eg Poole and Van de Ven, 1989, Smith and Lewis, 2011, Stoltzfus and al., 2011) and the literature on the tensions of companies sustainability, inspired us to theoretically explore the sustainability of companies in the light of paradox theory (Smith and Lewis, 2011). As a result, we have formulated our research questions as follows:
- To what extent can the theory of paradox contribute to the evolution of conceptions of sustainability and to improve understanding of responsible corporate behavior?
- And to what extent the concept of the ability to manage paradoxes could contribute to understanding the level of environmental and social commitment of enterprises.

Our response to these two questions will provide a renewed framework for analysis that allows for a better understanding of the conditions under which companies can improve their sustainability. This proposed theoretical framework combines the theory of dynamic capacities with the theory of paradox and aims, on the one hand, to apprehend the predisposition and the potentiality of the company to the sustainability, and on the other hand, to contribute to the understanding of the differences in the level of responsible engagement observed among companies.

1. The complexity of sustainability: from stakeholder theory to paradox theory.

Promoters of the concept of sustainable development, as a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs,

rely on a convergence between economic efficiency, social equity, and respect for the environment natural. The theory of stakeholders through its normative and instrumental dimensions was in most cases their theoretical "shelter" to legitimize their purpose in the company's world. Contrary to the expressed wishes, empirical research increasingly recognizes the contradictions linked to the integration of stakeholder interests in companies' decisions.

The fact of missing this aspect, makes the conceptualization of CSR, its practices and its evaluation, suffers from a generalized confusion and makes it oscillate alternately from myth to reality (Pougnet-Rozan, 2006).

To revisit this explicit, and sometimes implicit, hypothesis of a possible convergence between the economic, environmental and social dimensions of corporate sustainability, this could only be done with a critical reading of stakeholder theory, As the dominant theoretical framework and founder of corporate sustainability. Thus, on the basis of some limitations of this conceptual framework, we propose a conceptual shift towards the paradox theory as a new promising theoretical perspective.

1.1 Stakeholder Theory: Scope and limitations.

Stakeholder theory began to thrive in the managerial field after the publication of Freeman's (1984) book "Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach". This theoretical model, which is an alternative to the *"Shareholder Model"*, which is focused on shareholders, is a fertile framework for analyzing organization-environment relations. According to Freeman (1984), they are considered as stakeholders "all groups or individuals who may affect or be affected by the achievement of company objectives" (Freeman 1984: 46). These stakeholders may be internal (owners, managers, employees) or external (competitors, consumers, governments, pressure groups, media, community and natural environment) (Carroll and Näsi, 1997). As they may be primary, when their relations with the company are contractual or formal (owners, employees, suppliers and customers) or secondary, when their relations are informal or indirect (media, consumers, pressure groups, governments, competitors, Public and society) (Carroll and Buchholtz, 2000).

This theory, in its three uses: descriptive, instrumental and normative (Donaldson, 1995), is the most widely used repository in research on company social responsibility. To become responsible, companies must take into account the needs, interests and influence of the different stakeholders affected by their activities. As a result, the satisfaction of the different stakeholders appears to be an essential factor in the sustainability of the company (Hoffmann and Saulquin, 2009).

In its normative dimension, stakeholder theory attempts to understand the role of the company in society and to provide elements of response about its duties towardall stakeholders (Perspectives, 2004). This dimension insists on the nature of the corporate responsibility, its moral missions, and obligations toward all stakeholders. Thus, in view of the normative theory of the stakeholders, the interests of the stakeholders have an intrinsic value: each group deserves consideration from the company (Gherra, 2010). Freeman (1988) emphasizes that all stakeholders are equally important to the organization and meeting their expectations is seen as a purpose in itself. However, the main limitation of this approach is operational. It is not

possible to manage the opposition of interests (Chauvey and al., 2014) by emphasizing the idea of the equality of "stakeholders" and refraining from establishing priorities among themselves.

The problem of the opposition of stakeholder interests has led researchers to reflect on the hierarchy of interests and the distribution of power among stakeholders. In order to increase the operationality of this theory, Mitchell and al. (1997) point out that not all stakeholders are equal, their visibility for the company depends on three attributes: the power to influence the company, the legitimacy of the relationship, and the urgency of the stakeholder's demand on the company. While Etzioni (1998) suggests that stakeholder participation in management should be representative of their investment in the company. Therefore, it is no longer a matter of looking at the interests of all stakeholders but only of those that can influence the performance of the company (Gherra, 2010).

However, the stakeholder hierarchy proposed by the researchers, in order to operationalize stakeholder theory, leads to defending management methods that contradict its normative foundations (Chauvey and al., 2014). Because the normative idea of the equality of the stakeholders is not respected. Consequently, this hierarchical proposal can be read as a conceptual deviation of the stakeholder theory and a favoring of the instrumental dimension to the detriment of the normative dimension.

Moreover, the instrumental dimension apprehends the stakeholders as levers to increase the economic and financial performance of the company. In this perspective, the work defending the hypothesis of the business case, which sought above all to show that there is no contradiction between being a sustainable company and a competitive company, In other words, it is the widely diffused idea of *green and competitive* (eg Porter and Van der Linde, 1995, Hart, 1997).

Even with the instrumental argument, the stakeholder theory needs to be revisited. Empirical studies on the economic consequences of environmental and social actions often lead to contradictory results (Allouche and Laroche, 2005; Boiral, 2005), some work supports the Porter business case hypothesis, while others confirm the approach Classical approach, which considers pollution as a negative externality, the cost of which can be detrimental to the company's performance. In this sense, Hollandts and Valiorgue (2011) argue that the relationship between CSR and performance is not obvious; on the contrary, it is uncertain, and it is inevitable that a company engaged in a social responsibility approach will inevitably have to do facing many uncertainties. Epstein and al. (2014) confirm this orientation and indicate that trying to manage the different tensions between the objectives of social, environmental, and financial performance simultaneously is one of the most critical challenges in the field of corporate sustainability. This challenge can be explained by the tensions that may arise between shareholders and other stakeholders, and between different groups of non-shareholder stakeholders (Wang and al., 2016).

The tensions inherent in sustainability are becoming increasingly legitimate in scientific research, whether it is tensions due to the opposition of interests in the normative dimension or tensions between social performance and financial performance in the instrumental dimension. It is a research current under construction owed to the appeal of Margolis and Walsh, launched in 2003, for research that takes tensions between instrumental and moral

imperatives as a starting point for a better understanding of the behavior of companies with regard to societal problems.

Faced with this emerging line of research, which accepts the idea that the corporate sustainability confronts decision-makers in complex and tense situations, another line, still dominant, forgets or obscures these tensions. Moreover, Daudé and Noël (2006) point out that some researchers go so far as to break the link uniting sustainable development and the preservation of natural resources and mobilize the concept of sustainable development to designate the treatment of its employees with justice, This confusion shows, according to these authors, a difficulty experienced by both researchers and practitioners in assuming the tensions generated by responsible management.

In our view, this difficulty can be explained in part by their usual use of stakeholder theory, when dealing with CSR and the sustainability of the company questionings. A return on its foundations and evolutions shows this theory is silent on the incompatibility of the interests, values and powers that characterize the management of the various stakeholders. Indeed, this theory does not consider these tensions and seems ultimately insufficient to explain how the decision-makers in a company are likely to integrate the stakes of sustainability. Therefore, it seems essential to us to use another theoretical framework not as an alternative but rather complementary framework. Because stakeholder theory, despite all the criticisms, remains of paramount importance as a reading grid of the relationship between the company and its environment.

1.2 The paradox theory: a promising perspective.

Stakeholder theory and the resulting concepts seem to be based on an implicit assumption of possible convergence between the interests of different stakeholders and does not sufficiently reveal the complexity of sustainability induced by the coexistence of stakeholders with divergent interests and sometimes opposed (Chauvey and al., 2013, 2014). The growing recognition of the tensions, conflicts, and paradoxes inherent in the processes of sustainability, is gradually calling into question the coherence proposed by the stakeholder theory. Such a tendency suggests that the paradox theory - the organizational conceptual framework that places the greatest emphasis on organizational tensions and complex thinking (Smith and Lewis, 2011, Poole and Van de Ven, 1989) – possibly the most rigorous approach to understanding the tensions of corporate sustainability. This idea is fed by the recent assertion of Van der Byl and Slawinski (2015) that: "*Paradox theory presents an opportunity for researchers to delve into the nature of such tensions and how they can be managed to advance research in corporate sustainability.*" Van der Byl and Slawinski, 2015, p: 73).

Since the late 1980s, paradoxical thought has been at the center of much organizational theorization. In 2011, Smith and Lewis, in an article entitled "Toward a theory of paradox: a dynamic equilibrium model of organizing", published in the prestigious magazine "The Academy of Management Review", exploit the available literature and propose the theory of paradox as an opportunity to enrich organizational theorization. This new theory provides a clear overviewon the nature of competing demands in the organization and helps identify, explore and manage organizational paradoxes. Smith and Lewis (2011) define a paradox as "*contradictory yet interrelated elements that exist simultaneously and persist over time*" (p.386). The paradox is thus composed of two parts that seem to be opposites, but in fact,

reinforce each other (Ward, 2010). He opposes the dilemma which implies a choice between possibilities of the same attraction, as well as the conflict whose stake is the victory of one tendency over another. It is also distinguished from the dialectic in which the play of the thesis and the antithesis is resolved by synthesis (Guedri and al., 2014).

The literature on paradoxes is in full swing, increasing by about 10% each year (Smith and Lewis, 2011). Researchers are increasingly adopting this paradoxical perspective to understand and explain organizational phenomena. This research examines how organizations view and manage the contradictory and conflicting demands they face. Hence, the knowledge that comes from the paradoxical perspective is limited by fundamental debates about the nature and management of paradoxical tensions (Smith and Lewis, 2011). Overall, Stoltzfus and al. (2011) raise three fundamental propositions of the organizational literature on paradoxes:

- Paradoxes are inevitable to organizations.
- The paradoxes emerge at several levels: individual, organizational, inter-organizational and institutional.
- Organizational effectiveness is associated with a commitment to paradoxes rather than avoidance.

The number of works showing the relevance of paradoxical design in understanding the complexity of sustainability is in perpetual growth (eg Hahn and al., 2015a, Ramirez, 2012). Very recently, Chauvey and Naro (2014) indicate that CSR is fundamentally paradoxical because:
- Companies must simultaneously take into account the conflicting objectives, expectations and interests of the stakeholders.
- These different components are interrelated and the company cannot choose to eliminate one or the other of the stakeholders that are all essential to its existence.
- This conflict situation is structural and sustainable.

This paradoxical conception begins to take place in the field of *business and society* (eg Hattabou, 2012, Labor and Naro 2013, Chauvey and al., 2013, 2014, Grimand and al., 2014, Van der Byl and Slawinski,). It has reached one of the most popular concepts today in academic and managerial circles, the concept of global performance and its Balanced Scorecard instrumentation (Capron and Quairel 2006, Labor and Naro, 2013, Essid and Berland, 2013). In fact, the integrated equilibrium invoked by the promoters of this concept does not reveal the complexity and the contradictions inherent in the conflicting stakes of the three dimensions of sustainable development and the differentiated expectations of the stakeholders. What makes global performance an institutionalized myth (Travaillé and Naro, 2013) or, at best, a mobilizing utopia (Capron and Quairel, 2006). Thus, as indicated by Travaillé and Naro (2013), it would be more realistic to replace the Balanced Scorecard with the "Paradoxical Scorecard".

While stakeholder theory tries to answer mainly on the question: why the company needs to consider stakeholders, the mobilizers of paradox theory focuses on how to integrate social and environmental concerns. It opens promising paths of research in the field. This movement from stakeholder theory to paradox theory is therefore a movement in the field of sustainability of the business from the questions of what and why to the question of how.

Thus, recourse to the theory of paradox can be considered as an extension of the rationalization movement of the relationship between company and society in the 1970s (Acquier and Aggeri, 2008), driven notably by the current of responsiveness. This movement, against the mainstream of the time, approaches the field of the company and the society from the point of view of the company and analyzes the processes of deployment of the approaches of the CSR. Indeed, the paradoxical approach of the sustainability of the company and the current responsiveness of the CSR shares the pragmatic vision. Both highlight the complexity of the action of the dirigeant and focus on the problems and strategic and operational difficulties of integrating social and environmental issues.

2. The main sources of the paradoxes of enterprise sustainability.

The theory of paradox has gained importance as a lens to study many types of tensions within organizations (Smith and al., 2013). Most of these studies (eg Smith and al., 2013, Smith & Lewis, 2011, Lewis, 2000) focus on organizational tensions and paradoxes in a holistic way. Smith and Lewis (2011), on the basis of the existing literature, distinguish four types of paradoxes that companies face. First, the paradoxes of learning (learning paradoxes) that feed on the tension between learning by exploitation or the use of existing knowledge and learning by exploration or the creation of new knowledge. Then, the identity paradoxes that feed on the tension between the individual and the collective and the conflicts of role and values that this tension generates. Second, the organizational paradoxes that arise from the increase in organizational complexity, and in particular the tensions between stability and change. Finally, performance paradoxes arise because of the diversity of stakeholders, both internal and external, and their potentially contradictory and conflicting interests and objectives.

On the other hand, the tensions and paradoxes inherent in sustainability are not yet receiving enough attention from researchers. In a review of the sustainability literature over the period 2003-2014, Van der Byl and Slawinski (2015) identified just eight papers on sustainability tensions using the paradoxical approach (Berger and al., 2007 Wahen and al., 2007, Vilanova and al., 2009, Gao and Bansal, 2013, Scherer Palazzo and Seidl, 2013, Hahn and al., 2014, Hahn and al., 2015, Slawinski and Bansal, 2015). The main tension of the sustainability of the company that emerges from this research is first the opposition between the instrumental and the morale. Certainly the instrumental approach can solve several environmental and social problems, but certainly not all. The moral or normative approach is therefore necessary. What makes the opposition logical (commercial logic vs. moral logic), business case vs. moral case, organizational skills, extrinsic Vs. intrinsic), time frames, and the types of social issues addressed (Hahn and al., 2015b, p: 4).

The explicit recognition of the tensions and paradoxes associated with the integration of the environmental and social dimensions in the company is growing. Nevertheless, until now the nature of these tensions is not well explained in depth. To our knowledge, the work of Hahn and al. (2015a), inspired by the four organizational paradoxes of Smith and Lewis (2011), is the only contribution that has been able to develop a systematic framework (Figure 1) on the different tensions in the process of corporate sustainability.
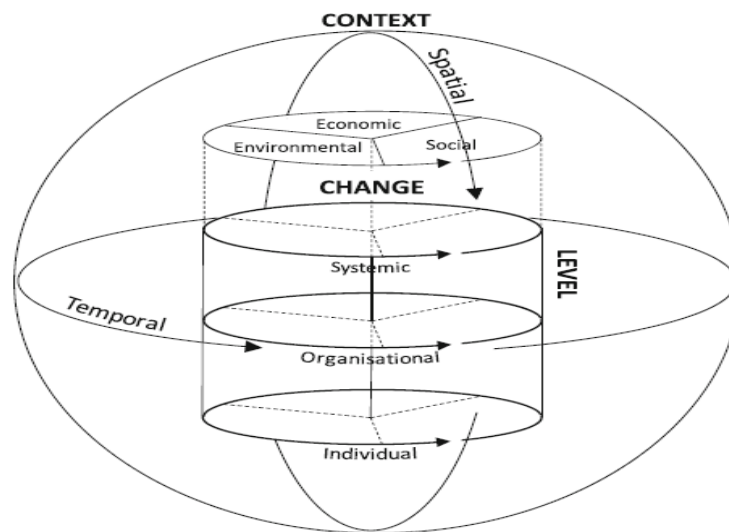
Figure 1: Systematic framework for the analysis of the tensions of the sustainability of the company

Source: Hahn and al. (2015a, P: 5).

This integrating framework of Hahn and al. (2015a) distinguish between three dimensions: level, change and context, in order to capture and clarify the origins and characteristics of tensions in terms of sustainability.

-the level as source of tension

Three levels are identified by Hahn and al. (2015), the confrontation of which can be the source of several tensions and paradoxes when integrating the dimensions of sustainability, namely: the individual level, the organizational level and the systemic level.

Individual level factors, such as personal values and preferences, determine how decision makers make sense of corporate sustainability (Bansal, 2003). Tensions between individual and organizational levels arise when perceptions of sustainability issues diverge significantly between policy makers (Banerjee 2001, Henriques and Sadorsky 1999). Some may be convinced and motivated to respond to social and environmental problems and see their organization as a good way to do so, others will not see sustainability as an issue that their organization should address (Hahn and al. 2014). As a result, tensions emerge between individuals within and across the hierarchy and organizational structure on organizational responses to sustainability. In addition, individuals who defend the environmental or societal cause may face constraints imposed by the organization such as culture, structure, policies, or incentive systems (Bansal 2003). Thus, as an individual, the framework can be part of a sustainable development approach, but the organizational imperative of the market and competition prevents it from joining it as a manager (Hoffmann and Saulquin, 2009).

Moreover, the tensions linked to the dimension of the level may have as their source the inter-organizational relations, Quairel and Auberger (2007) in their study of the supplier relation, they evoke the situation of the paradoxical injunctions to characterize the contradictory

demands of certain large Enterprises to their suppliers (SMEs) to meet the low price economic requirements and compliance requirements with CSR codes of conduct and standards.

From a systemic perspective, sustainability extends beyond organization and emphasizes the company's contribution to a more sustainable society in the broad sense (Whiteman and al., 2013). Tensions between the organization and the systemic level arise when sustainability initiatives at the organizational level do not respond to the institutional pressures and expectations of society. Generally, there is a discrepancy between what the target audiences expect of the organization and the organization's actual performance and performance in terms of sustainability. In this sense, Hahn and al. (2015) indicate that there may be tension when there are differences between the sustainability requirements of the systemic level and decisions made at organizational levels.

 - Change as a source of tension.

Change is the only constant of organizational life, Lewis (2000) points out that the paradoxes of organization are particularly widespread in times of change; this is the obvious result of conflicts between what is old and new. This is explained, according to Poole and Van de Ven (1989), by the fact that the existing culture and structure reject and inhibit behaviors aimed at change. In addition, change implies an evolution of organizational objectives becoming more divergent. As a result, organizations tend to solve problems caused by the constraints and tensions associated with the multiplication of objectives.

The sustainability of the company requires a process of change in the priorities of the company, the strategy designs and the operationalization devices. This change must be directed towards alternative paths and transformations that lead to more sustainable business practices. In this context, Hahn and al. (2015) suggest that tensions arise from changes in the pattern of activity already in place. More specifically, Boiral (2001) points out that the integration of the proposals of the environmental standard ISO 14001 into the daily management of the company can meet resistance or contradictions difficult to overcome, because of the bureaucratic burden of the Norms and risks of conflict with the company's management philosophy.

-The temporal and spatial context as a source of tension.

Another source of tension arises from the temporal and spatial elements of the context in which the transition to sustainability took place (Hahn and al., 2015). The temporal dimension is the very essence of the definition of sustainable development in Brundtland's report: "a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". The main temporal tension is that sustainability requires a long-term orientation, while short-term vision prevails over financial objectives and dominates company decision-making (Hahn and al., 2014, Slawinski and Bansal, 2015) .

The spatial context creates tensions that refer to another key element of sustainable development, namely, intra-generational equity. This concept refers to the equitable opportunities for development between developed and underdeveloped regions as well as within both. The spatial context leads to tensions when companies operate in developed and developing countries where environmental or social standards are different. Hahn and al.

(2014) highlight as an example of this type of tension, multinational enterprises that face the challenge of complying with country-of-origin standards, host country standards or universal standards. These spatial tensions affect environmental and social justice.

Faced with these multiple tensions, which are sources of the paradoxes of the sustainability of companies, a few questions deserve to be raised:
- How do companies respond to the paradoxes raised above? Should they be accepted or avoided ?.
- Do the answers to the paradoxes constitute a conscious and deliberate strategy or a managerial capacity which develops in the company through the time? And how far this ability or strategy can explain the sustainability of a company.

3. From the management capacity of stakeholders to the ability to manage paradoxes.

Responses to paradoxes are at the heart of the concerns of researchers who are interested in the paradoxical perspective of organizations. According to Chauvey and Naro (2013), we must distinguish between the cognitive treatment of the paradox (acceptance or non-acceptance), and the behavioral responses that can be translated into strategies of dissociation and / or synthesis.

There is no doubt that companies that deliberately resort to paradox management strategies will have more potential to respond effectively to the paradoxes that will be faced. However, the skills needed to effectively accept and manage a paradox are complex and not easily imitated. In this sense, Schuman and al. (2010) indicate that managing paradoxes is both science and art. Therefore, based on a combination of the theory of paradox and the theory of resources and competence, we propose to consider the ability to accept and manage the paradoxes of sustainability as a dynamic capacity that develops more in the Time and in a particular context.

3.1 Managing the paradox of sustainability.

The responses advocated against the divergent paradox between the strategies of acceptance and resolution. Poole and Van de Ven (1989) suggest that leaders can respond to contradictory elements or underlying tensions in organizations through four main strategies: acceptance of the paradox, temporal separation, spatial separation, Or, finally, the strategy of synthesis. The first strategy of accepting the paradox and trying to work on its implications can serve as a preliminary step for the other three strategies (Epstein and al., 2014). Lewis (2000) states that researchers often focus on three interrelated mechanisms of managing paradoxes: acceptance, confrontation, or transcendence, which refers to the ability to think paradoxically, that is, To go beyond the contradictions, and to rely on them to evolve. While Smith and al. (2012) propose three competencies that allow to more effectively embrace competing demands: acceptance, differentiation, and integration: acceptance implies recognition of competing demands as an integral part of organizations and learning to live with them , Differentiation focuses on recognizing the unique contributions of each option, while integration involves identifying creative synergies between contradictory elements. Thus, tensions can be a source of new ideas, creativity and innovation.

Schuman and al. (2010) summarize these different approaches to managing paradoxes on a continuum (Figure 2). Although six distinct approaches are identified, in many cases there is considerable overlap between them. The three traditionally more algorithmic approaches are labeled "Either / Or". They are more effective for less conflict problems that require a decision or a solution. Concerning the most intense and lasting conflicts, such as the paradoxes of sustainability, the authors (Schuman and al., 2010) invite companies to adopt a right-side approach to the continuum labeled "Both / And ". This side encompasses more heuristic solutions and offers greater long-term benefits because they capture the energy inherent in the two apparently opposing sides of the paradox.
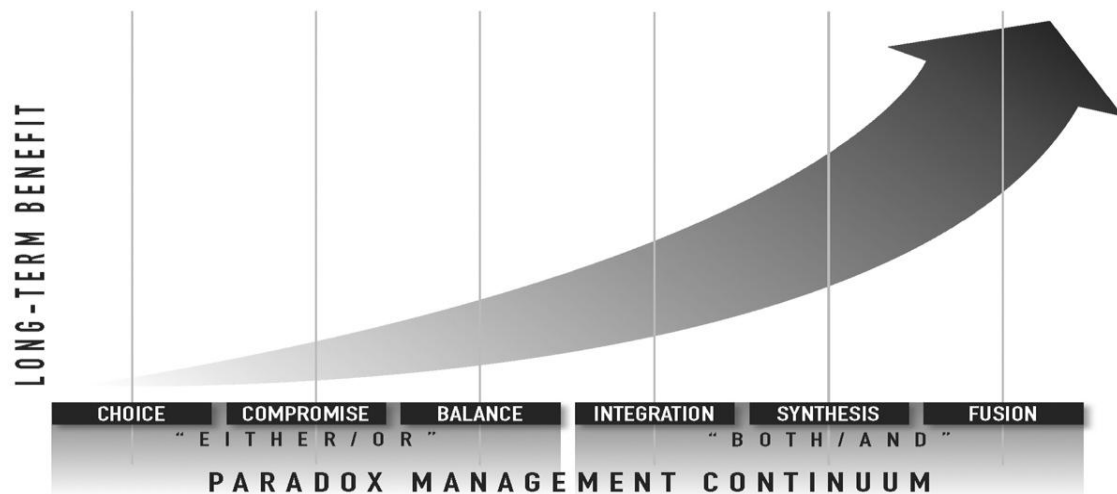

Figure 2: Continuum of the management of Paradoxes.
Source: Schumann and al., 2010, p: 98.

Based on the Procter & Gamble cases, The Home Depot and Nissan North America, Epstein (2014) confirms that the four modes of paradox resolution suggested by Poole and Van de Ven (1989), can be mobilized in the implementation of sustainability.

The common idea to these authors, cited until now, is that these approaches of managing paradoxes are imitative strategies that can be used by any company. However, the management of paradoxes requires individual characteristics and capabilities. The theory of paradox postulates that leaders who think paradoxically, ie. Which are capable of juxtaposing, exploring, and integrating contradictions (Ingram and al., 2014), are more likely to embrace and synthesize competing demands, and are more likely to exploit the positive paradox potential (Lewis 2000 Smith and Lewis, 2011). Similarly, Hahn and al. (2014) adhere to this idea and argue that paradoxical thinking allows acceptance rather than elimination of tensions between economic, environmental and social concerns. Smith and Lewis (2012) propose three other leadership competencies, along with cognitive complexity, which are mutually reinforcing and essential to managing paradoxes: trust that is an inner strength to take risks and act Uncertainty and ambiguity rather than becoming anxious and defensive, conflict management and finally the competence of communication that allows leaders to make their collaborators more comfortable with the paradox. Effectively managing a paradox requires openness on the part of leaders and begins by accepting rather than avoiding tensions (Smith and Lewis, 2012).

Indeed, without paradoxical thought, the narrow answers to paradoxical tensions may prove counterproductive. If only one side of a tension is stressed, the demands of the other will intensify, fueling anxiety and paralysis in decision-making (Lewis, 2000). This is quite clear in the work on corporate sustainability. Several researchers (Cameron, 1986, Ehnert & Harry, 2012, Lewis, 2000, Smith & Lewis, 2011, Galuppo and al., 2014) suggest that managing multi-stakeholder conflict processes requires paradoxical thinking And to put into practice. This cognitive ability to accept tensions around social issues reinforces a manager's awareness of the need for more radical responses to current global challenges (Hahn and al., 2014). In fact, today we can say that a consensus is being built on the importance of paradoxical thinking as a lever for the sustainability of organizations.

In addition to the individual level, at the organizational level, the management of paradoxes requires dynamic capabilities specifically related to the processes, routines and skills that allow a group or organization to display a paradoxical attitude. This organizational attitude favors the use of intertwined and iterative strategies of acceptance and resolution (Smith and Lewis, 2011). Therefore, this idea of the management of paradox as a deliberate strategy must be qualified. In our view, managing paradoxes is a capacity rather than a strategy. This can be more remarkable in the field of sustainability of the company.

Hahn and al. (2015) recently mobilized the concept of organizational ambidexterity to conceptually convey the importance of managing the paradox in the company's social performance. (Simsek and al., 2009, p: 865) (Simsek and al., 2009, p. 1). These researchers suggest that organizational ambidexterity which covers an organization's ability to perform differently and often simultaneously. (Gibson & Birkinshaw, 2004: 210), is a determining factor in the social performance of firms (Hahn and al., 2015) . This ability to combine conflicting strategies also helps to preserve the legitimacy of the company in the face of the multiple, heterogeneous and contradictory institutional challenges linked to sustainable development (Scherer and al., 2013). Thus, firms that use the "both / and" perspective rather than the "either / or choice" perspective are more prone to becoming accountable.

3.2 Towards the management of the paradox as a dynamic capacity.

The theoretical perspective of dynamic capabilities developed in the 1990s as an extension of the Resource and Skills (RBV) approach. Barney (1991: 101) proposes to define the latter as "all assets, capacities, organizational processes, attributes, information, knowledge, etc., controlled by a firm, which allow it to design and implement Strategies that increase its effectiveness and efficiency ". In their founding article, Teece and al. (1997) define dynamic capabilities as "the firm's ability to integrate, build and reconfigure internal and external skills to cope with rapidly changing environments." The dynamic capability approach (Teece and Pisano, 1994; Teece and al., 1997) appears to be one of the most influential of the last decade in analyzing the competitive advantage of firms.

In relation to sustainability, researchers have mobilized the resources and skills approach to examine the factors that may favor the integration of environmental and social concerns, and in particular to explain the differences in the level of commitment between Large enterprises and SMEs. Variables such as size, innovation, financial situation and human resources are often used to explain the responsible behavior of SMEs (Robichaud and al., 2012; Berger-

douce and al., 2008). The Resource and Skills Theory was a key entry point for analyzing the integration of sustainable development into Gherra's company strategy (2010a). Based on the literature on corporate sustainability, Gherra (2010b) lists the different resources and skills required for environmental commitment in the following table:

Table 1: Typologies of resources and skills involved in an environmental strategy.

Hart (1995)	Sharma and Vredenburg (1998)	Buysse and Verbeke (2003)	Bowen and Sharma (2005)
Habits of Employees	Integration of the parties Stakeholder	EnvironmentalCompetence	Resource margin
Strategic planning process	continuousInnovation capacity	Human Competence	Combination of Resources and Competences
Management of stakeholders	Organizational Learning Capacity	Organizational Competence	Dynamic capacity
Continuous Innovation		Process Competence	
New competence and technology		Strategic Planning Competence	

Source: Gherra, 2010b, p: 145.

This table explicates the important role of dynamic capacities in the sustainable commitment of companies. Zollo and Winter (2002) distinguish in their article three learning mechanisms that allow the firm to build dynamic capacities: tacit accumulation of experience, articulation of knowledge (through collective discussions, debriefing assignments, Evaluation processes) and the codification of knowledge (through manuals of written procedures, project management software). The concept of dynamic capacity is now an analytical framework to study the conditions for creating competitive, lasting, rare and non-imitable advantages for companies. It is also included in all types of resources and skills that promote the sustainability of the company, proposed in Table 1, under different terms. This legitimizes its mobilization as a theoretical reference for understanding the responsible behavior of companies.

Peters and Waterman (1982) illustrate that excellent firms have paradoxical characteristics, but they are capable of managing, balancing and balancing them. Thus, according to the latter, "The excellent companies have learned how to manage paradox". In addition, Guedri et al. (2014) suggest, referring to Rothenburg (1979), who concluded that, at the individual level, tensions resulting from simultaneous incompatibilities play a key role in increasing creativity, that tensions and paradoxes can become Genuine drivers of organizational learning. From an evolutionary perspective, these authors indicate that some articles explicitly mention the determining role of tensions in order to generate a dynamic of transformations of the organization's routines and thus emerge from a form of determinism. Schuman and al. (2010) add that the capacity to recognize and manage the paradoxes of many family businesses is a largely instinctive and deliberate capacity. Therefore, we believe that managing paradoxes is

more a strategic ability that develops over time than a deliberate strategy taken by the company consciously.

The paradoxical tensions of sustainability require a paradoxical thinking, a more fluid and holistic state of mind, based on the distinctions and synergies between the elements of the paradox in the search for solutions (Ingram and al., 2014). As a result, we support, by analogy with the concept of stakeholder management developed by Hart (1995) (Table 1), that the management of paradoxes is a dynamic capacity that can promote the sustainability of the company. This "capacity" of the management of paradoxes can be defined as the ability to recognize, accept and respond effectively to the demands on both sides of the paradox. In the light of the ideas developed above, the concept of "capacity" in the management of paradoxes can constitute an additional theoretical perspective explaining the differences observed in companies with regard to the question of sustainability.

Conclusion

Stakeholder theory was initially analyzed as an extension of agency theory, centered on shareholder-manager relations. Its supporters try to assert its explanatory superiority with respect to agency theory (Mercier, 2001). It is by this same theoretical evolutionary spirit that the theory of paradox is introduced today, its promoters demonstrate through empirical work that it has an important explanatory potential of organizational phenomena and suggest that it covers facets Organizational arrangements not yet covered.

This paper has focused on this conceptual movement in a more specific field, which is sustainability. Indeed, this nascent line of research, which adopts a paradoxical approach to explaining the behavior of companies to social and environmental issues, increasingly favors this conceptual shift from stakeholder theory to the paradox theory. As part of this conceptual movement, we have introduced the concept of the "capacity" of the management of the paradox, resulting from a combination of the theory of paradoxes and the theory of dynamic capacities, in order to contribute to a better understanding of Sustainability of enterprises.

(Schuman and al., 2010) argue that with efforts to explore and understand the concepts and techniques of the many paradoxes they face, companies will increasingly be able to recognize and manage future paradoxes (Schuman and al., 2010). This implicit capacity will become more explicit, and even more useful for managing all sorts of paradoxes. It is in this sense that we came up with the idea of proposing the concept of the "capacity" of managing paradoxes as an attribute of sustainable enterprises, referring to the lessons of the theory of dynamic capabilities.

The proposed framework seems relevant to researchers to identify the degree of environmental and social commitment of firms, and partially overcomes the limitations of the traditional theoretical framework of stakeholder theory. As it also proposes a new grid of reading profiles of managers, more representative of the reality of the challenges of sustainability. However, this new perspective does not pretend to substitute the others because the need for a multi-paradigmatic approach is still demanded by researchers dealing with sustainability issues (Boubaker Gherib and al.2008).

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Our goal is to open a new avenue to approach the sustainability of companies. However, empirical studies are still needed to judge the real explanatory power of this new approach and to operationalize the concept of the "capacity" of the management of the paradox. Given the still limited number of empirical studies examining the sustainability tensions based on the paradoxical approach (Van der Byl and Slawinski, 2015).

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