

Cascades: What is it and how did it reach sustainability in a highly competitive sector?

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Nothing gets lost, nothing gets created, everything gets transformed. - Antoine de Lavoisier

Case problem: How to succeed in reconciling profitability with environmental and social sustainability.

Case synopsis: In an opinion article published in *Les Affaires*, a Quebecer newspaper, Professor Robert Dutton (HEC Montreal) underscored quite rightfully that ethics is useful when it disturbs. Reproaching to ethics, governance and responsibility rules “to bother” is to corroborate their very *raison d’être*. Some companies adopted a different stance though with regards to responsibility. Instead of considering it as a burden, they integrated its principles as a key distinctive business feature, that ultimately resulted in a competitive advantage. The case presents the case of a company who managed to achieve just that. It portrays the family-owned Cascades company in Quebec, Canada. The company started in the 1960s in the fields of manufacturing, processing and marketing of packaging products and tissue paper mainly composed of recycled fibers to become a world-class giant through various mergers, acquisitions and business expansion in the 2010s. What is remarkable about this company is that this successful expansion did not change its core values and principles, even in the most difficult times. In fact, Cascades was able to remain truthful to its founding principles, and it might be precisely that form of integrity which propelled the company to the summit. It appears that, Cascades did not succeed despite sustainable development practices but rather because of them. The case is therefore articulated around the four key success factors of (1) culture and values; (2) stakeholder management; (3) reuse philosophy; and (4) resource efficiency, which have contributed to Cascades’ success in reconciling profitability with environmental and social sustainability, hence sustainable development.

Keywords: Sustainable development; competitive advantage; culture and values; stakeholder management; reuse philosophy; resource efficiency; Quebec

Learning objectives

- Learning Objective 1. Explore the notion of sustainable development in the case of a for-profit organization.
- Learning Objective 2. Identify how the principles of sustainable development may be implemented in practice to spur sustainability both in production and consumption.
- Learning Objective 3. Examine the key success factors for a successful implementation of sustainable development.
- Learning Objective 4. Assess the importance of culture and values, stakeholder management, reuse philosophy and resource efficiency to foster corporate growth within the sustainable development ethos.
- Learning Objective 5. Determine the challenges and perspectives faced by a company committed to sustainable development over the long run.

Themes and tools used

Content analysis of secondary data.

Theoretical background

This case study adopts the sustainable development framework which was originally outlined in the Brundtland Report (1987). The concept of sustainability revolves around the idea of a “triple bottom line” (hereafter, TBL)—the social, environmental, and economic components of sustainable practices (Elkington 1997, 1998a, 1998b). This theoretical model originally aimed at measuring corporate performance, taking into consideration not only the traditional financial bottom line but also less quantifiable indicators that measure social and environmental impact categories, i.e., the social bottom line and the environmental bottom line.

The first dimension of economic sustainability refers to business practices that sustain long-term economic and financial growth while avoiding negative impacts on the social, environmental and cultural aspects to the communities in which the business operates (UMW, 2015). The second dimension of environmental sustainability should be considered from a maintenance of natural capital viewpoint. To Daly (1990), for renewable resources, it refers to the rate of harvest does not exceed the rate of regeneration (sustainable yield). For pollution, it refers to the rates of waste production that do not surpass the assimilation capacity of the environment; and for non-renewable resources, it refers to the depletion of resources that is being compensated by the development of renewable substitutes for that resources.

The last dimension of social sustainability refers to the identification and management of business impacts on stakeholders in the supply chain and of the organization at large. It deals with the recognition of the significance of the organization’s relationship with individuals, communities and society (ADEC, 2020).

Recently, some frameworks also include a fourth cultural dimension (ADEC, 2020). However, in this study, the focus will be put on the original triple bottom line framework.

This framework presents two general advantages for methodological accuracy in assessing sustainability practices. First, the TBL framework highlights the relationships among the three main elements of sustainability (Elkington, 1997, 1998a). Visually, the three bottom lines can be mapped as three circles which overlap in a Venn diagram. Ideally, a company should seek to operate at the intersection of this diagram, where all three bottom lines are satisfied.

Second, each dimension (i.e., circle) can be measured by specific and measurable reference points (Slaper and Hall, 2011). In fact, the three dimensions of sustainability can be measured using indicators that may vary across countries or industry but sharing the commonality of quantitative reporting and assessment that is critical for managerial decision-making. This has been proven very useful in a managerial context where managers are increasingly under pressure for providing measures of the impact and success of their programs and activities.

Interest in the triple bottom line has, therefore, increased across for-profit, nonprofit and government sectors (Rezapouraghdam et al. 2018). Researchers and managers have adopted the TBL sustainability framework to evaluate their sustainability performance (Ghannadpour et al., 2020). Although the purpose of this case study is not to measure specific sustainability dimensions of Cascades, these two features show that the sustainable development framework is a well-known and a well-implemented one, across the globe and disciplines. Therefore, it constitutes a useful framework for this research as well. In sum, the TBL framework is well-suited for the purpose of this research since it emphasizes both the tripartite and measurable aspects of the sustainability concept.

Companies are increasingly under pressure to deliver not only financially, but also environmentally and socially. This can become puzzling and confusing for managers. Yet, this case study shows that reconciling the diverse pieces of the sustainability puzzle, albeit challenging, is feasible. Better, it may also ensure sustainable competitive advantage on the market, even in an international business environment. This study case focuses on Cascades, a Quebec Canadian company that has thrived on implementing its motto that everything must and can be recycled while people must be taken care of. The case presents the four pillars that enabled Cascades to implement the principles of sustainable development across its three encompassing dimensions for business growth.

1. Introduction

This case study aims at showing how a company was able to reconcile successfully the three dimensions of sustainable development.

More specifically, the study presents the four key success factors that enabled that success, namely culture and values, stakeholder management, reuse philosophy, and resource efficiency. Furthermore, the study also presents challenges and perspectives face by the company to uphold its sustainability standards in the future. Recommendations for business practitioners are also provided.

Cascades is a Quebec paper manufacturer founded in 1964 by Bernard Lemaire and his brothers Laurent and Antonio. The three brothers revived an old disused mill of the Dominion Paper Cie in Kingsey Falls, in the province of Quebec, Canada. This is the birth of Papier Cascades inc. and the company headquarters have remained located at Kinsey Falls, Quebec, since then. After almost six decades in business, Cascades works still predominantly in the fields of manufacturing, processing and marketing of packaging products and tissue paper

mainly composed of recycled fibers. To be more specific, Cascades' activities are grouped into four groups (Cascades, 2020a):

- (1) *Cascades Groupe Carton Plat Europe* manufactures coated flat cardboard products made from virgin and recycled fibers such as folding boxes and microcannelated packaging.
- (2) *Cascades Containerboard Packaging* designs containerboard and flat cardboard products, corrugated cardboard packaging as well as folding boxes. Nearly 80% of the products of the containerboard group consist of recycled fibers.
- (3) *Cascades Specialty Products Group* concentrates its activities in four sectors: consumer product packaging, industrial packaging as well as recycling and recovery. Among other things, the company designs honeycomb cardboard and polystyrene trays for the food packaging industry.
- (4) *Cascades Tissue Group* manufactures and transforms tissue paper: facial tissue, paper towels, paper towels, toilet paper, napkins and paper rags. The company designs products for the retail and professional markets under the Cascades Fluff™, Cascades Tuff™ and Cascades PRO™ brands.

The activities of these four groups enable both the professional and the consumer market to, produce and consume more responsibly. As such, Cascades is a well-known reference for companies or individuals seeking to develop more sustainable production or consumption practices.

Currently, the company has units in more than 90 countries, employs about 12,000 employees, and offers more than 500 products and services (Cascades, 2020a).

The story of Cascades is inspiring due to the pioneer nature of the business as geared toward sustainability, at a time when those ideas did not really exist. Before even founding Cascades

in 1964, the Lemaire family “saw life in green”, “Sustainable development was not yet in the customs of the time that these Quebecers shared a deep conviction: reuse, recover and recycle are gestures to be valued for the good of the environment and society” (Cascades, 2020a). Table 1 presents a timeline of this development of Cascades into sustainability.

Table 1. Development of Cascades toward sustainability

Year	Key developments
1964	Foundation of Papier Cascades inc.
1967	The Lemaire family develops a profit-sharing program with employees.
1969	Cascades’ fifth anniversary. The significant economic contribution to the communities surrounding the company, is underscored in Kingsey Falls.
1971	Cascades creates <i>Forma-Pak</i> , a molded pulp factory made from 100% recycled fibers.
1974	After a decade in business, Cascades has 165 employees and generates sales of \$ 7.2 million.
1976	Cascades moved to Cabano by setting up a containerboard factory there.
1977	Cascades specialize in the production of toilet paper, paper towels and industrial paper, all made from recycled fibers.
1983	Cascades is listed on the Montreal Stock Exchange and penetrates the United States.
1985	Creation of a Research and Development Center and acquisition of Cascades’ first factory in Europe, at La Rochette, France.
1986	In North America, employee participation in the company is growing: more than half of them are shareholders of Cascades

1995	Cascades enters the energy market by acquiring <i>Boralex</i> , an electricity producing company to develop and operate renewable energy.
1997	Cascades merges its activities with <i>Domtar</i> in the containerboard industry, giving birth to <i>Norampac inc.</i>
2006	Cascades becomes the full owner of <i>Norampac</i> .
2008	Cascades merges with the Italian <i>Reno de Medici, S.p.A.</i> for its cardboard manufacturing activities.

Source. Cascades (2020a). Une vision avant-gardiste. Available at : <https://www.cascades.com/fr/developpement-durable/planete/entreprise-circulaire> (accessed on 15-07-2020).

As can be seen in the timeline, the Cascades company follows a form of triple bottom line (people, planet, profit) by seeking to ensure not only profits, but also human well-being (people) and environment preservation (planet) (Slaper and Hall, 2011). For example, its specialized in manufacturing products out of recycled fibers is tangential to the environmental dimension (i.e., planet), while implementing a profit-sharing program with the employees shows a deep commitment to the social dimension (i.e., people). The economic dimension (i.e., profits) remains evidently important since the company has continuously sought to grow and expand its business either by organic growth, mergers, or acquisitions. The company calls this the “planet, prosperity, partners triad”. It comes therefore as no surprise that, to Corporate Knights, the company ranks among the 100 most responsible companies in the world, and ranks 49th. It is also the only company in the Containers and Packaging category appearing in the ranking, where there are only twelve Canadian companies (Cascades, 2020b).

This chapter focuses on the evolution of a company that has made a deep commitment to sustainable development from its inception. At a time when managers and business developers are increasingly keen on furthering their corporate social responsibility activities, a complete

permeation of those principles within companies remains challenging. Moreover, it remains unclear what drivers do most particularly contribute to successful balance of the three dimensions of the triple mission: people, planet and profit. This chapter uses Cascades as a study case in order to provide crucial insights into these areas of inquiry.

The main body first delineates the development and positioning of the company within a sustainable development framework. That detailed account of the history and evolution of Cascades shows how a company may be successful while genuinely following a path towards sustainable development and remaining true to its cores values. That understanding provides the basis for the discussion of the key success factors for successful sustainable performance. A final section outlines the challenges and perspectives faced by Cascades for its future development.

2. Development and positioning of the company

In order to understand the importance, the problematic and the dynamics of sustainable development at Cascades, it is important to know its evolution. The following description of this evolution is largely based upon Bernatchez and Cossette's (2007) detailed report about Cascades. Cascades is built around people determined to build a business as prosperous as it is respectful of the human and natural resources that are sources of its success (Bernatchez and Cossette, 2007). Among them, the vision of the three brothers Lemaire helped transform the small business family recycling business, founded in 1957 as a multinational packaging and paper company. So, fraternity has always been a fundamental component of the organizational culture of Waterfalls.

In the year 1964, the Lemaire's officially started the manufacturing of products made from recycled fiber when they buy, in Kingsey Falls (Quebec), an abandoned mill from the *Dominion Paper Cie*. This transaction gives birth to *Papier Cascades inc*. In 1971, expansion

begins for Cascades with the creation in Kingsey Falls of Cascades *Forma-Pak*, its first molded pulp mill made from 100% recycled fibers. This event kicks off dispatch of the development of a real paper complex in the heart of the small town of Estrie: from 1972 to 1977 were born successively *Kingsey Falls Paper* (multilayer cardboard), *Industries Cascades* (tissue papers), *Cascades Plastics* and *Cascades Conversion*. Paper crates Cascades in the region of Cabano, Quebec, come next.

At the beginning of the 1980s, the company is listed on the Montreal Stock Exchange. Later that year, Cascades entered in the United States with *Cascades Industries Inc.*, Rockingham, North Carolina. In Quebec, Cascades launches into the manufacture of Kraft paper in East Angus and acquires, the following year, a boxboard factory in Jonquière, in the region of Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean, Quebec.

In 1985, the company took root on the European continent when it acquired the plant in boxboard from La Rochette, France. This business development will materialize in 1986 with the founding of *Cascades S.A.* and the acquisition of a second boxboard manufacturing plant in Blendecques, France. Between the time period from 1987 to 1989, other factories in Duffel, Belgium, and Djupafors, Sweden, as well as in Blendecques, France, will be added to the fold of Cascades. In North America, employee participation in the company is also growing: more than half of them are Cascades shareholders.

At the beginning of the 1990s, *Cascades Énergie* emerged. This subsidiary then oversees a whole new natural gas cogeneration plant, to generate the energy necessary for the proper functioning of the Kingsey Falls paper complex. This project will lead Cascades to invest more in the promising sector of energy with the acquisition, in 1995, of *Boralex*. In 2007, *Boralex* shares are 34% owned by Cascades. In August 2017, the Cascades company, at the origin of the creation of *Boralex*, sold all of its shares to the *Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec*

(*CDPQ*), which thus acquired 17.3% of the company. In December 2017, the British magazine *A Word About Wind* ranked Patrick Lemaire, the President and CEO of *Boralex*, 58th in its annual ranking of the most influential players in the wind industry (PRnewswire, 2017). Since 2019, it has participated in the “Green Electricity of Controlled Origin” (EVOC) offer, guaranteeing a renewable and French origin, marketed by *Plüm Énergie* (Environnement Magazine, 2019).

Cascades Énergie is the prelude to a series of acquisitions resulting in the activities of Cascades being greatly diversified. With the purchase of *Rolland and Paperboard Industries Corporation* in 1992, *Perkins Papers* in 1995, and *Provincial Papers* in 1997, and the creation of *Norampac* with *Domtar* restructure Cascades in five distinct groups working in the fields of specialized packaging, containerboard, tissue papers, boxboards, and fine papers. In 1997, the growth of Cascades in Europe expands further with the acquisition of a boxboard factory in Arnsberg, Germany. In 1998, a conversion unit was started in Wednesbury, England.

With the transition to the year 2000, the 2001 acquisition of factories in Pennsylvania and in Wisconsin. Two years later, the group moved to Alberta, New York, Arizona, Oregon and Tennessee. In 2004, the boxboard sector acquired *Dopaco, Inc.*, an important producer of packaging products for the fast food industry.

Appreciation of the Canadian dollar, higher energy and fiber prices, strong competition: the 2000s also presented challenges for Cascades, which can be seen in the obligation to implement a major rationalization plan. The process resulted in the closure of plants in Red Rock, Montreal, Thunder Bay, Buffalo, Pickering, and Boissy-le-Châtel. In 2005, Cascades sold its distribution assets of fine papers (*Cascades Resources*) and tissue papers (*Wood Wyant*).

Recently, the company has earned several prizes that recognize its deep commitment to sustainable development. The *Kingsey Falls Public Market*, an initiative of Cascades, was

recognized among the winning projects of the *2020 Novae Awards*, which recognizes impact initiatives that respond to social or environmental issues. The public market initiated by Cascades in 2015 with various local stakeholders, promotes access to greater dietary diversity and short-circuit distribution (Cascades, 2020c). Cascades also received a *DUX Grand Prix, Products* category, for its most recent innovation in food packaging: a 100% recycled and 100% recyclable cardboard tray (Cascades, 2020c). Cascades is also part of the list of the 50 best corporate decisions for the planet published by *Earth Day Canada* and *Earth Day Initiative*, in collaboration with the media *Corporate Knights*. This recognition underlines Cascades' role as a pioneer in recycling (Cascades, 2020c). Last but not least, the *Cascades Tissue Group - Wisconsin* plant received the *2020 Excellence in Energy Efficiency Award* from the *FOCUS ON ENERGY®* organization. This award recognizes the efforts of the company since it has carried out more than ten projects for sound energy management over the past three years (Cascades, 2020c). Moreover, the company ranks 16th in the ranking of the 50 best Canadian corporate citizens according to *Corporate Knights* magazine. Worldwide, Cascades is among the 100 most responsible companies according to *Corporate Knights* and ranks 49th. Cascades was also awarded the *Good Design Awards*, awarded annually by the Chicago Museum of Design and Architecture Athenaeum (Cascades, 2020e). Finally, Cascades was named one of the 2020 top 300 employers in Canada according to Forbes magazine (Cascades, 2020e).

3. Factors to successful performance in sustainability

From the above, it emerges that sustainable development at Cascades fits logically within an innovative and strategic framework of business development. Companies often struggle to maintain a balance between the three poles of sustainability (people-planet-profit) not to mention governance with ESG standards (environment-society-governance). Yet, this balance seems to have been found by Cascades. An external observer might argue that Cascades was able to unfold a strategy centered around sustainable development because it evolves in a niche

market or a “safe haven” that is free from competitive pressure. Yet, quite the opposite is true. The pulp and paper industry has been under significant external constraints such as the rise in the cost of energy, the emergence of Chinese and Brazilian producers, the rise in the raw material of forest fiber, and so on. In that sense, Cascades’ road toward success seems all the more unsettling. Therefore, one might ask: Despite all the hurdles on the path towards sustainability, how did Cascades succeed into fostering sustainable development as a core mission and value in all of its business activities? The answer may lie in a series of four key success factors that unlocked Cascades’ sustainable potential (Lévesque, 2019). By so doing, the company was able to infuse sustainability into its products, processes, systems, procedures, and services.

The following sub-sections discuss into greater depth these four key success factors which have contributed to Cascades’ success in implementing sustainable development in a company itself grappling with sustainability issues. These four key success factors are also summarized in Figure 3.1.

[INSERT FIGURE 3.1 ABOUT HERE PLEASE]

3.1. Family culture and values

As underscored in 2012 by Ken Peattie and Frank-Martin Belz in their best-selling book *Sustainability Marketing* (2nd ed.), nothing is as powerful as a strong sustainability-oriented culture. That type of culture typically values long-term orientation, human-scale exchanges, and stakeholder perspectives. Culture is a vast concept but reflects a series of key underlying mental schematas such as morals, beliefs, norms, values, management philosophy or management style. Aktouf (1988) made a thorough ethnographic account of these abstract higher-order layers at Cascades during the company’s aggressive expansion phase in the 1980s. However, strikingly, the first observation that he made was a very open management style, at

all levels, and a freedom - even an incentive - to speak fully and generally. What is striking then is the small number of hierarchical levels: roughly four levels, from the simple employee to the vice-presidents of the head office. Here are two elements of primary importance which combine a whole set of practices which, for the classic manager, would seem a managerial heresy: short-circuiting of hierarchical layers and fair worker compensation.

With regards to the short-circuiting of the hierarchy:

“The short-circuiting of the hierarchy is common and perfectly accepted (a worker can go to headquarters and ask his problem directly to the president or a vice-president).

The titles and designations of the positions are vague and considered by all as unimportant (one can simply be "in charge of" or "responsible for").

Positions (including high-level positions) are not the subject of a description or job description. We just explain in broad outline what everyone will have to do.

The doors of offices, wings, buildings ... are all strictly open to whoever wants them. The general rule is to carefully avoid having to refuse an interview to anyone in the company, for whatever reason (the president, Bernard Lemaire, is in the habit of saying that if the employee considers that what he has to say is important, that is enough to listen to him).

No information is considered confidential vis-à-vis employees. Apart from a few technical details, all the information is available, concerning production, profits, sales ... and most of it is posted (to the nearest month) in all workshops.

In the factories, there are only workers, factory managers and their deputy. Outside office hours, including weekends, only the workers are alone. The central machine

attendant in the process is then "responsible", without being invested with official powers" (as reported in Aktouf, 1988)

Turning now to the compensation offered to workers:

"The wages paid are among the highest in the sector (for comparison, the Montreal paper converting company, of the same type as one of the Cascades factories in Kingsey Falls, pays exactly half as much). The average annual wages of the worker in 1986 is approximately \$ 30,000.

A substantial portion of the profit before amortization and taxes (which can go, for the worker, up to 7% of his annual salary) is redistributed to all employees.

In 1982, on the occasion of the company's first public issue of shares, five shares were offered as gifts to employees for each year of service.

All employees can use, for personal purposes and without charge, any tool, installation or vehicle of the company, including weekends, they just need to inform.

Any employee who builds their house will receive, on request, free of charge, the building materials produced by the company.

All employees can acquire shares of the company which are financed two years without interest by the employer.

Everyone has the right to make mistakes and is encouraged to "try their hand", whatever the position or level.

Everyone is encouraged to make their point, to make suggestions. Everyone is listened to.

There is no separation of tasks or positions. Everyone can, if they wish - and are encouraged to do so - learn something else, learn, replace, swap ... it is enough that there is an agreement between the employees concerned.

The layoff of anyone considered senior management to be "a serious thing to avoid at all costs". We will first exhaust all possibilities, including the transfer from one factory to another.

There is a general meeting of each of the workshops at least once a year, including where there is no union, to discuss - directly with management and a representative of senior management (usually one of the Lemaire brothers) - working conditions, salary increases, grievances ...” (as reported in Aktouf, 1988)

At a time (in the 1980s) when the principles of corporate downsizing, offshoring, outsourcing, and reengineering started to gain traction in the industry, to spur profit maximization (Déry, 2010), Cascades chose a different path. An open management style and worker benefits that are quite comparable if not superior to the best in the industry and even elsewhere, became the trademark of the company and facilitated the realization of the other key factors of sustainability (and success).

In fact, Cascades knew a spectacular success at the start of the 1980s, in a sector in great difficulty, that of pulp and paper. To reach that success, the training, permanent self-training and self-qualification are for many dependent on the "philosophy management" specific to the company (Aktouf, 2006). In what the people of the Cascades Company themselves call "the Cascades philosophy", there are a few major constants in the mode of management and manager-directed relations which have always been present there (Aktouf, 2006):

- (1) Proximity, respect, trust... are the terms that come up most systematically in the mouths of all the people working in (e.g., employees), or with (e.g., suppliers) the

company, to qualify their way of relationships and of life in and in relation to at Cascades, whether they are senior managers or core employees.

- (2) Privacy, availability, humility... are the words used to characterize the behavior of executives and senior managers towards any employee.
- (3) Friendly, familial, fraternal, friendly, generous behavior... above all “business” behavior is considered by all to be the “trademark” of the Cascades style.
- (4) Appropriation vis-à-vis the work situation, in terms of concern for a job well done, corporate image, performance, (shared) results, and so on is a dominant feature of the organizational climate. Each and every one feels personally concerned with what is being done or not done, and what will be done.
- (5) Visibility and transparency-franchise-consultation in everything related to achievements, accounts, projects, decisions are considered as immovable assets.

In sum, this is "shared power" at Cascades. It means that the place of real decision-making organization, remains the basic employee and his team among peers, the "hierarchy" (reduced moreover to 3 or 4 levels maximum everywhere) being there to first "work as everyone" and then to answer the operators' questions and needs to "do their job well" (Aktouf, 2006). All the members of the hierarchy, at all levels and at any time (e.g., at home, during night shifts, on public holidays) are likely to be "challenged" by any employee who feels the need.

Cascades' management method, largely given as "shared management", is therefore, in a nutshell, a management method which presents itself as genuinely "participatory" (Aktouf, 2006). That is to say, as a “humanistic approach to management”, participation does not stop only at the operational aspects of the management of production, but extends widely to the sharing of reflection on future strategies and projects, on the ins and outs of decisions taken or to be taken, on the corrective measures to be made along the way to the achievements in progress, on the rates and destinations of the profits made, plant by plant (Aktouf, 2006). All

information of all kinds (e.g., technical, accounting, financial, strategic) is shared in real-time, with whoever wants it, when they want it. Additionally, who wants it, can be "transmitter" of information and be guaranteed of the appropriate listening, even at the highest levels (see also Aktouf, 2006, for a detailed review). Mario Plourde, current CEO of Cascades since 2016, who manages 11,000 employees worldwide and 4,500 in Quebec wraps up the philosophy eloquently as follows (Laperrière, 2016):

“We continue to do what we have always done. We do integration days when we have new executives. We continue our way of communicating with employees, with formal and informal meetings, our open-door policy. We don't like to hide behind a door. We want supervisors to be accessible, to be on the floor, for our employees to be near them. As a company, we keep the commitments we had at the beginning. We are a company that was born from sustainable development and we are staying the course. We are socially engaged people. We support hospitals, schools, athletes ... We haven't changed the Cascades formula, because it's a good formula that has served us well for 50 years.”

All this makes this company one of its sector (despite being reputed to be cyclical, having had difficult times for over a decade) among the most stable in terms of jobs, the most prosperous in terms of expansion and results.

However, while these are important principles that imbue the corporate culture, this does not mean that the company never had to make difficult choices. But even in hard times, the persistence of Cascades to hold to its key values and principles tells a lot about the truthfulness of their approach. In 2009, *Norampac*, a division of Cascades decided that the production capacities of the company had outgrown demand, which fell. In fact, the economic crisis had hurt the factory, which produces corrugated cardboard boxes used, among other things, for shipping (Drolet, 2009). Cascades' customers produced fewer products in Quebec or had fewer

requests so that the company ended up with less demand. It was then necessary to reduce production to be more competitive and the older facilities, such as the one in Quebec City, were the first to be closed (Drolet, 2009). Remarkably, the company still tried to relocate or transfer its employees to other factories.

Despite the goodwill, though, many factories faced similar difficulties and could not absorb the worker surplus. The *Norampac* division of Cascades, alone had, therefore, no other choice then to layoff almost a thousand employees over the year of 2009 (Drolet, 2009). It is worth mentioning that in contrast to some multinationals laying off employees after record-high profits, Cascades never did so. For example, the 2018 results shattered records both in terms of sales and operating profit before amortization, yet, no employee was laid off to maximize those records even further in 2019 (Noël, 2019). In fact, the only cases of layoffs occurred in such extreme situations as the wake of the global financial crisis, which jeopardized the very survival of the whole company itself.

3.2.A will supported by real planning with stakeholders

The will to sustainability is notably enshrined in Cascades' sustainable development approach as follows (Cascades, 2020a):

“Cascades values the opinion of its stakeholders in order to clearly identify the core priorities of its sustainable development approach.”

Cascades works therefore like a family internally with its employees, but also externally by considering itself as a member of a broader family-like network consisting of stakeholders and partners. However, this focus does not manifest itself into a vacuum or in unapplied corporate memos. Rather, it is carefully channelled through careful and rigorous planning.

Internally, Cascades implements levers to establish and maintain the corporate culture. “The values of Cascades are lived. There is a real concern for keeping the local environment.

It is not an industrial area and there is a lot of greenery" (Genium360, 2019). The day before the environmental impact was therefore avant-garde at the time. Other key elements support that integration of the corporate culture: employee engagement, their knowledge of business objectives, the concrete applications of action plans, or the recognition program (Genium260, 2019).

Externally, following the ISO 26000 standard, the company engaged in a more thorough dialogue with its stakeholders which allowed the company to grasp the effect of its operations on both the environment and society, by taking notice of the individuals and organizations that are involved or impacted (Cascades, 2020d). In 2009, the company performed a materiality analysis which consisted in the consulting of key stakeholders including employees, product consumers, shareholders, corporate clients, NPOs, suppliers, students and others (Cascades, 2013a), as shown in Figure 3.2.

[INSERT FIGURE 3.2 ABOUT HERE PLEASE]

In partnership with an independent external firm, the contacted stakeholders via an online survey, consultation workshops and interviews (GRI, 2016). The results of the analysis of the primary data thus obtained, pinpointed priority sustainable development issues for both Cascades and its stakeholders. The materiality analysis supported Cascades in identifying its most "material issues" and determine what should be reported and focused on. Figure 3.3 shows an example of such a materiality analysis. The horizontal axis, ranging from left to right means an increase in the level of materiality for Cascades, so the more to the right, the more important. Conversely, the vertical axis, ranging from bottom to top means an increase in the level of materiality for the stakeholders identified in Figure 3.3.

[INSERT FIGURE 3.3 ABOUT HERE PLEASE]

In the 2010-2012 Sustainable Development Plan of Cascades, a total of 9 strategic objectives were eventually selected and reported as important to focus on for the 2010-2012 period, including (Cascades, 2013a):

- **Energy:** Reduce the quantity of energy purchased to make products (environment)
- **Waste:** Increase the recovery of waste materials (environment)
- **Water:** Reduce the amount of waste water (environment)
- **Sustainable procurement:** Source materials from responsible suppliers (economy)
- **Innovation:** Develop and market new products (economy)
- **Financial performance:** Optimize the return on capital employed (economy)
- **Health and safety:** Reduce occupational injuries and illnesses (social)
- **Employee mobilization:** Increase the level of employee commitment (social)
- **Community involvement:** Increase contributions in the communities where facilities are located (social)

The same sustainable development targets were then found again and re-used to report on Cascades' sustainable performance over the 2013-2015 period. In the 2016-2020 Sustainable development plan, the company added a tenth objective, **greenhouse gas emissions** (Cascades, 2016). The company should unveil its new sustainable development plan by the end of this year (2020).

3.3.Reuse philosophy

According to Batellier, Raufflet, and Hébert (2013), Cascades has grown by buying low-cost assets in financial difficulty. Factory rehabilitation followed the principles of "recycling" and "reuse" of assets. For example, in 1985, Cascades made entered La Rochette, France when acquiring two boxboard plants, one in 1985 and another one in 1986. Other mills located in Sweden, Belgium were acquired in the 1980s and so was the case for *Perkins Papers, Rolland*

and Paperboard Industries Corporation, Provincial Papers in Canada and other companies in Germany, the United States and the United Kingdom, in the 1990s.

On a more environmental ground, despite the current trend toward the minimization of packaging, Cascades-being an important packaging producer-considers that growth perspectives remain strong in that sector (Noël, 2019). According to Mario Plourde, president and CEO of Cascades in 2019, the company tries to reduce its environmental footprint by using the maximum amount of recycled materials and promoting eco-design. For example, in 2019, 82% of Cascades' raw materials are recycled and the company tries to increase this percentage (Noël, 2019).

The integration of social and environmental responsibility within the processes also contributes significantly to sustainable energy performance. In 2013, Cascades marks the 15th edition of *Energy Efficiency Week*, an initiative of the Ministry of natural resources which takes place from November 24 to 30, by reiterating its objective of reducing energy consumption and by encouraging other companies to do more (Cascades, 2013b). It is in this perspective that Cascades announced, through its 2013-2015 Sustainable Development Plan, that it was continuing its efforts by aiming to reduce by 3%, by the end of 2015, the quantity of energy purchased to make its products (Cascades, 2013a).

In an attempt to improve the energy efficiency of its various manufacturing units, Cascades innovated 15 years ago, by setting up an energy intervention group (*Cascades GIE inc.*). Since its inception, it has successfully completed hundreds of projects that enabled estimated savings of more than 7,500,000 gigajoules and cumulative energy savings of more than \$ 60 million (Cascades, 2013a). By the end of 2015, Cascades had in place energy efficiency measures and projects totaling nearly 600,000 gigajoules, which equals the consumption of 5,900 Canadian households. Among these initiatives are the reduction in the use of live steam, recovery by

installing heat exchangers, and daily and real-time monitoring of plant consumption (Cascades, 2013a).

Cascades' energy management practices have earned the company recognition for the *Hydro-Québec Ecoelectric* network, which brings together large companies whose leadership and energy performance are exceptional. With this expertise developed over the years, Cascades now shares this success by offering its external partners its energy skills.

Currently, with Industry 4.0, there is more data today and leveraging this data will add new opportunities to develop energy efficiency projects (Genium360, 2019). The company's research and innovation center as well as the engineering consultancy in engineering and project management of Cascades allow the development of new projects for sustainable energy performance at Cascades, but also in Quebec.

Resource optimization

Energy efficiency management is one of Cascades' common approaches to analyze the main sources of energy consumption (Genium360, 2019). The operational and investment angles are considered for each project, meaning that the company seeks how it can better operate, recover factories, reuse old machines, modernize factories and transform old assets. The recovery of waste is also a priority. For example, for a heat loss recovery project, there will be an exhaustive review of the processes in order to assess the best recovery potential. The goal is to recover that waste to heat the building or heat a process. For example, a steam generator can recover 15-20% of the energy available in the evacuation of a tissue paper machine (Genium360, 2019).

The attempt to increase resource productivity aligns squarely with the objective of the circular economy. According to the Ellen MacArthur Foundation's (2015) online definition, "a circular economy aims to redefine growth, focusing on positive society-wide benefits. It entails

gradually decoupling economic activity from the consumption of finite resources, and designing waste out of the system”. As such, the circular economy model is akin to various schools of thought including natural capitalism (Lovins, Lovins, Hawken, 2013), blue economy systems (Pauli, 2010), the performance economy (Stahel, 2010), the cradle-to-cradle design philosophy (McDonough and Braungart, 2010), industrial ecology (Lifset and Graedel, 2002), and biomimicry (Benyus, 1997), to name but a few.

Cascades implements environmental practices that contribute to a circular economy and related philosophies through greater resource optimization. In fact, the company is known for offering products made from recycled fibers that carry certification labels such as *processed chlorine free (PCF)*, *Green Seal*, *Green-e®*, or *EcoLogo*. Cascades products are also made with less water than the Canadian industry average, while they are biodegradable and compostable. Overall, these resource optimization processes and tactics align well with the engineering ethos and business objectives of efficiency. Most importantly, they also “enable [the company] to manufacture a higher quality product with a smaller ecological footprint” (GE, 2016, p. 2). Therefore, Cascades has reduced its carbon footprint by 50% over the past 25 years by investing heavily in energy efficiency, renewable energies and employee expertise (Roy, 2018). The transport electrification pilot project should further that trend. During the official announcement, Mario Plourde, CEO of Cascades, challenged other Quebecer companies (also humorously called “Québec inc.”) to set up similar programs.

Summary

Albeit motivated by sustainable principles, Cascades also faced a couple of challenges, particularly during its expansion phase as well as during times of crises. The company was able to retain its sustainable ethos by sticking to a few core principles. Albeit this is not always an easy task to do, the management team was able to inspire that vision to its staff and partners.

An overall four-key factor framework also emerged from the analysis of Cascades' operations to explain that success.

Discussion

Cascades is known to the general public for its tissue products (toilet paper, paper towels, napkins). It is the 1st producer in Canada and the 5th in North America. However, the overall offering is much broader and includes different types of packaging, ranging from food containers to cardboard boxes to industrial packaging (David Suzuki Foundation, 2017). In Canada, Cascades is the leader in most of these markets and also occupies a strong position in the US market. Its expertise in several areas has led the company to offer services in energy management, engineering, as well as external research and development.

As a manufacturer of recycled fiber products, and whose major products are mostly made of recycled fibers, there are a series of key challenges that the company is currently facing to uphold its sustainable positioning.

First, the availability of raw material is a key issue. The company has long been the only one in Canada to make paper and cardboard from 100% recycled fibers, but other companies have joined that market. Among them, *DS Smith* provides corrugated packaging for consumer and industrial goods; *International Paper* is a packaging and paper company; *Smurfit Kappa Group* is a company producing corrugated and paper-based packaging; and *WestRock* manufactures and sells paper and packaging solutions for both the corrugated and consumer markets. All of them are involved in recycling activities (Craft, 2020). That increase in competition has necessarily resulted in greater demand for recycled fibers. Certain categories of paper are also in decline, such as printing and writing papers including newsprint and office paper, which affects some of the company's revenues, especially those of tissue papers.

Second, Cascades is also preoccupied by the quality of the raw material. This issue has faded somewhat thanks to the equipment that the sorting centers have acquired (David Suzuki Foundation, 2017). However, the issue of quality will continue to be important. Cascades needs to work at the source to help recover more and of better quality. To that end, the company even suggested a few tips for consumers to improve the quality of the recycled material. According to Marie-Ève Chapdelaine:

“Citizens can take very simple actions, for example, separating recovered materials. Many packages include paper and plastic. When placing them in the bin, it is preferable to separate them, this facilitates the work of the employees of the sorting centers. The recycling bin should include only containers, packaging and printed matter. If in doubt, it is recommended to call your municipality, which will provide you with information.”

(David Suzuki Foundation, 2017)

Third, we are entering an era where the minimization of packaging is put forward. However, using sustainable development as a competitive advantage (Belz and Peattie, 2012), the Cascades company is convinced that it can still grow in this sector of activity. The company is notably working to reduce its ecological footprint by using as much recycled material as possible and by promoting eco-design (Noël, 2019). In 2019, 82% of Cascades' raw materials were recycled and it appears that the company seeks constantly to increase that percentage (Noël, 2019).

Finally, the digital transformation, also known as “industry 4.0” is also a strong trend. With Industry 4.0, there is more data today, but the valuation of this data should allow the addition of new opportunities to develop energy efficiency projects (Genium360, 2019). The company’s research and innovation center as well as Cascades' engineering and project management consulting component allow the development of new projects for sustainable energy

performance at Cascades, but also in Quebec (Genium360, 2019). The need to transform enables a better achievement of sustainable objectives. This shift to technology (especially industry 4.0) to better reach key sustainable objectives (especially the circular economy) has been largely emphasized in the literature as the next big trend that is formed by two megatrends, just like two giants who meet (Gu, Guo, Hall, and Gu, 2019). For example, Narayan and Tidström (2020) advanced the tokenizing of competition using blockchain technology for transitioning to the circular economy.

In recent years, Cascades has implemented a program to optimize its business processes in order to strengthen the customer approach, increase efficiency and improve profitability (CTEQ, 2017). This program affected the company's supply chain, finances and human resources. This has resulted in the integration of several technologies, including the implementation of an integrated management software package and communication platforms such as *IP telephony* and the *Office 365* suite (CTEQ, 2017).

To continue its ascent in Industry 4.0, Cascades pays particular attention to respect for its employees and their environment. The digital strategy is being deployed (CTEQ, 2017):

- involving all departments and employees in the process;
- by staying abreast of market developments;
- by quickly and efficiently integrating new features;
- by developing an innovation strategy;
- by intensifying a unique expertise in sustainable innovation.

Meanwhile, in accordance with its culture and values of putting people first, Cascades has managed technology to empower employees instead of replacing employees by machines.

When the first new technologies were incorporated into factories, employees would comment and some reluctance was felt (CTEQ, 2017). They had a lot of questions and were worried about the changes. Cascades therefore chose to involve them in the search for solutions, and this approach was successful.

Since then, the company has engaged its employees in the transformation process, from the start of the project (CTEQ, 2017). This helps target the most damaging problems and engage them in the development of possible and viable solutions. This approach ensures the success of the transformation, because the worker engaged in the process is convinced of the solution and participates in its realization.

When the first robots were introduced to the company, the employees were enthusiastic (CTEQ, 2017). For them, it was a project that came to fruition thanks to their commitment and their recommendations. They felt responsible for choosing the new technological solution.

In recent years, and in accordance with the open management principles at Cascades (Aktouf, 1988, 2006), a training center has been set up at Cascades to train super-users. Employees who wish to become experts in new technologies are trained. They can then support their colleagues and train them in turn, as needed. Skills are thus developed within staff while strengthening team spirit (CTEQ, 2017).

Cascades has also implemented a succession plan in each plant to identify the potential of employees to access certain positions. A training plan is then developed with supervisors and human resources (CTEQ, 2017). It is also repeated in each division for the integration of new employees.

Change and innovation are part of Cascades' DNA. Its way of integrating new technologies and new management practices into its operations ensures that it continues to be a pioneer in its field (CTEQ, 2017). With Cascades, we might therefore expect to see, over the coming years,

new waves of innovations to foster sustainable development in both oceans of the professional and retail markets.

There are a number of key take-aways from these case studies for managers who wish to reach socially responsible consumers. First, to be considered by such consumers, organizations need to integrate sustainable principles in the foundations of their organization. However, consumers are also sensitive to sincere and genuine attempts towards sustainability. Therefore, as shown in the case of Cascades, to reap consumers' trust and willingness to pay, sustainability is not a one-shot activity but results from a long and convoluted process that evolves over longer periods of time. One key challenge to maintain socially consumers' trust and interest resides in the maintenance of sustainability principles even in periods of crises or paradigmatic shift where old principles tend to appear out-dated or unfitting with the new business realities. This is a time, when businesses need to make an introspection into their core values and navigate through difficult times. One example in the case pertains to the layoff of workers in the aftermath of the subprime crisis in 2007-2008. This contradicted the company's social sustainability but proved essential to the very survival of the company, through the economic sustainability. From the previous, it follows secondly that a small number of core principles might be easier to follow and to adjust than a large number of them. Parsimony is therefore preferable to exhaustiveness. This is also important from a communication perspective, where fewer key messages will be easier to disseminate to consumers instead of many messages. Third, idiosyncratic realities (different places, different industries, different partners, etc.) of companies and diverse consumer profiles will create a whole range of diversified opportunities for sustainable success factors. But even within a specific industry, not every company will thrive on a similar set of factors. The four factors that have been studied in this case are unique to Cascades and may not work as effectively in another company due to different business realities. This flexibility needs also to be considered. Fourth, successful sustainable

development in the past is only partially indicative of success in the future. It might be that principles and values that on which the company thrived in the past need to be not abandoned but reinvented in the future. For example, in attempt to avoid layoffs (a core social principle of the company) Cascades resisted by reallocating workers to other plants or adapting their tasks. Besides, sustainable development goes beyond cosmetic actions and superficial communications. It is all about a very authentic motivation by managers to provide a positive contribution to the market, communities and the world. This is important in the eyes of consumers who value sincerity and authenticity. Finally, while consumers remain considered as consumers, sustainable-oriented companies treat them more as partners and key stakeholders who co-create value with the company. Cascades walks the talk by showing that it values its consumers not only as buyers and payers but also as insightful partners through their stakeholder management program. Consumers need therefore to be heard not only as consumers but also more generally as individuals with meaningful opinions. This respect that Cascades shows internally to its employees is also demonstrated externally to its consumers to further the companies' credibility and be in a better position to market confidently to consumers.

Conclusion

This chapter focuses on the case of the Quebecer Cascades company to illustrate how an organization might successfully embrace sustainable development for corporate growth. After retracing the timeline of the company development, the case emphasized the four key success factors that have enabled Cascades to achieve balance between the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental dimensions. More specifically, the case discusses how a strong family culture and values, real planning with key stakeholders, reuse philosophy and resource efficiency principles were unfolded by the company to keep a balanced approach to sustainability. A glimpse into the challenges and perspectives faced by the company is also provided to offer insightful avenues for the future

development of the company. The elements presented in this chapter may not constitute a recipe for immediate and guaranteed success. However, they surely provide a point of reference, some food for thought and a blueprint to help managers, decision-makers and policy-makers to navigate through the increasingly complex challenges of sustainable development.

Lessons learned

- To implement sustainable development successfully, organizations need to weave sustainable principles in the very core of their business model, mission, vision, and strategies.
- Being sustainable is easy in the short-run or for small periods of time. The most difficult aspect in being sustainable is actually to remaining sustainable over the medium- and the long-run, especially in times of crises or business paradigm shifts.
- A company needs to identify only a few key factors that fit with the sustainability ethos, that fit well with its business model, that could constitute a basis for competitive advantage, while being more or less easy to uphold even in unconventional times and disruptions.
- The case presented four key success factors that are specific to the company under study. Yet, different companies will have different factors of success. Companies should identify those factors that fit most adequately with their markets, business model, objectives and capacities.
- While remaining true to a few key sustainability principles elaborated in the past is a good approach to sustainable development this should not preclude the company to remain oriented towards the future and anticipate how those principles might be challenged or possibly adapted to continue to thrive.
- The different factors and approaches presented in this study case are not a recipe for success in sustainable development. A managers' genuine approach to consistently

striving to uphold a few key sustainable principles is more appropriate, will likely results in more successful outcomes.

Discussion questions

1. Sustainable development is a major constraint on businesses as it deprives them from their entrepreneurial freedom and imposes too strict requirements on managers. Discuss that statement.
2. A stakeholder management approach might enable a company to better consider its key partners and communities impacted. What could be the pros and cons of such an approach?
3. To which sustainable dimension does industrial relations and layoffs refer to? Do you think that “not laying off at all cost” is a reasonable sustainable principle? Justify your answer.
4. If you were hired as a strategy consultant by Cascades, what would you recommend to the company in order to face the rising challenges of the coming years, especially regarding automation and digitization trends?
5. Sustainable development is a road to success for companies. Discuss that statement.

Project/activity-based assignment/exercise

Choose a company that you think was able to implement successfully the principles of sustainable development in the three dimensions of sustainability (3BL) and used that as a competitive edge. Try to identify the key factors pertaining to sustainable development which enabled the company to be successful. How do they compare to Cascades' success factors? What do you conclude?

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