


Disability as a Driving Force of Sustainable Business Models in the Fourth Sector

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Abstract

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We are living in unprecedented times in which sustainability is essential to economic growth, quality of life and national stability. In this context, *Solidaridad y Trabajo Virgen del Camino* (SOLTRA) emerges as an example of a firm in the fourth sector that has achieved the triple bottom line of sustainability: economic, social and environmental performance. Although SOLTRA's current efforts are mainly focused on the social sphere through the recruitment and integration of people with disabilities into the company and, consequently, into the labour market and society, it also pursues environmental and economic objectives. In the present study, we analysed SOLTRA's business model by applying the theory of planned behaviour and the resource-based view of the firm. The information derived from in-depth interviews with SOLTRA's CEO and top managers from the operations and human resources departments, as well as public financial and social reports, allowed us to identify the cornerstones of its business model. The model is based on incremental technology, holistic behaviour and the integration of social activities that help identify better business opportunities. In this study,

several implications for managers, policymakers and citizens are provided. These findings may contribute to the development of managerial practices that can help companies to achieve better outcomes by using new approaches to solving social and environmental problems and identifying new opportunities for vulnerable citizens.

Keywords

Fourth sector

Triple bottom line

People with disabilities

Sustainability

Business model

1. Introduction

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Although measuring disability poses several challenges due to the diverse aspects of disability examined, reporting sources and data collection methods, among other factors, it is estimated that over 1 billion people live with some form of disability (World Health Organization and World Bank 2011). People with disabilities have higher rates of poverty. This is mainly attributed to barriers in accessing education, training and employment (Wolfe and Haveman 2000). According to the 2011 ad hoc module of the European Union Labour Force Survey (European Union 2015), nearly 45 million people are considered to be disabled in the EU-28, which represented 14% of the population between 15 and 64 years old. Defining disability as having difficulty completing basic activities, the distribution of working status for the EU-28 aggregate shows that people with disabilities have a lower employment rate (47.3%) than nondisabled people (66.9%), and the percentage of inactive people is higher (46.2% versus 25.9%) (European Union 2015).

These data become even more worrying when we look at the current situation in Spain. The most recent information at the country level reveals that 6.2% of the working-age population (1.9 million people) have a disability rating of 33% or higher (Servicio Público de Empleo Estatal 2019). The employment rate for disabled people more than 38% lower is lower than that of nondisabled people (25.8% and 64.47%, respectively). Moreover, the inactivity rate for disabled people (65%) is more than double the rate of nondisabled people (23.3%).

Improving hiring outcomes for people with disabilities not only helps to reduce income disparities but also contributes to community integration and reduces negative stereotypes by providing emotional support (Barnes and Mercer 2005;

Lewis et al. 2011). These social benefits justify governmental initiatives and research into the area. Although social and legislative efforts to incorporate people with disabilities into the workforce have been made in many countries around the world, there is still a long way to go. Furthermore, the ultimate decision of whether or not to hire a person lies with individual business owners and managers, so it is vital to know what determines their behaviour on this matter.

The theory of planned behaviour states that human behaviour can be explained as “a function of salient information, or beliefs, relevant to the behavior” (Ajzen 1991, p. 189). With this in mind, some previous literature has studied the beliefs and perceptions of employers towards people with disabilities. The common approach adopted by these works is based on the underlying premise that most of a business’s workforce is composed of nondisabled employees. Nevertheless, there are also companies in which the situation is completely different: these organizations follow a standard practise of employing people with disabilities, and this recruitment policy becomes an identifying feature. In fact, this practice may become a sustainable competitive advantage. Thus, the resource-based view (Barney 1991) of the firm may provide a useful framework to explain how, given the right contextual and firm-specific circumstances, a company can gain a valuable capability based on its policy of hiring employees with disabilities that is difficult for its competitors to imitate. This is a sustainable business model (SBM) that creates customer and social value by integrating social and business activities (Schaltegger et al. 2015). The goal of this chapter is to explore the actual situation of this specific type of hybrid organization.

This study is based on an in-depth analysis of *Solidaridad y Trabajo Virgen del Camino* (SOLTRA), a Spanish social enterprise that has maintained an SBM since its foundation in 2000. SOLTRA employs nearly 400 people, more than 90% of whom have disabilities. Semi-structured interviews with the top managers allowed us to investigate their beliefs regarding people with disabilities. We compared these with the beliefs expressed by employers of majority of nondisabled workforces in the previous literature to develop an understanding of how the differences identified may lead SOLTRA to behave more proactively in favour of the integration of people with disabilities into society.

2. Sustainable Business Models

One of the main goals for any businessperson is to develop and implement a successful business model (BM). Of the numerous definitions of BM that have been proposed, maximizing value and return for the owners of the firm has

traditionally been considered to be the main goal. The introduction of economic interests when operating in the third sector is problematic. Business contributions to social causes used to be carried out in collaboration with civil society organizations. However, more recently, an alternative method of addressing societal needs has emerged in the form of a fourth sector. The fourth sector consists of firms that integrate social and environmental issues into their BMs in pursuit of profitability. In general, empirical evidence has caused profit and nonprofit organizations to focus not only on their daily activities regarding their operational processes to satisfy short-term shareholders' interests but also on the need to maximize value for all stakeholders and adopt a more proactive stance in this regard.

As mentioned above, BM can be understood as how companies do business and how value is created, including a value proposition for customers and all the strategies and policies followed in pursuit of profitability. Usually, BMs are long term oriented, which brings into consideration the issue of sustainability. Although there is no general consensus on the definition of an SBM, it generally refers to a way in which a firm creates and captures value (Magretta 2002; Teece 2010) through innovation that leads to a better economic, environmental and social performance (Evans et al. 2017). As stakeholders' demands are continuously changing, the goal of corporate sustainability challenges traditional BMs based on value proposition, creation and capture (Lozano 2018). Thus, innovativeness becomes a key factor. Academics and practitioners admit that it is necessary to develop innovative BMs that address stakeholders' demands from an innovative perspective (Lecocq 2010) that combines competitiveness and efficiency with sustainability.

Stubbs and Cocklin (2008, p. 104) state that SBM "could be conceptualized in various ways such as a narrative of sustainability practices; a description of features, attributes and/or characteristics; a list of necessary and sufficient conditions; a representation of business processes; a firm-level description; a system-level description; or some combinations of these". Sustainable business models are oriented to achieve a triple bottom line, i.e. economic, social and environmental objectives. Along that same line, Zott and Amit (2010) propose that the selection of the activities of the organization (what), the structure of the organization (how) and the person who performs the change (who) are the three keys to achieving a successful SBM. Schaltegger et al. (2012) suggest that the integration of social and environmental goals in addition to economic value contributes to the development of an efficient SBM. The appearance of SBMs, consisting of hybrid models where social demands are considered business objectives without renouncing a certain level of profitability and economic

stability, has given rise to a fourth sector, which has completely changed the relationship traditionally assumed between business and society.

Although the final outcomes of an SBM might be clear to academics, entrepreneurs and managers, the process of implementing the corresponding sustainability strategies is unknown. The resource-based view suggests that capabilities that are valuable, rare, difficult to imitate and nonsubstitutable best position a firm for long-term success. This argument stays solid when referring to long-term success from an economic point of view as well as from a social and environmental perspective. Having the appropriate resources is key to planning and implementing an SBM. In this sense, Stubbs and Cocklin (2008) showed that interaction with stakeholders is highly advisable to incorporate sustainability into a BM, so such an interaction also becomes an important resource. Specifically, among all the stakeholders, employees constitute the most valuable resource to develop a successful SBM (Abdelkati and Täuscher 2015). Communicating the firm's strategy to its employees and having their support are vital. It is necessary not only to have high-quality applicants and employees that can contribute to success in a given market (Bohlmann et al. 2018) but also to require their factual commitment and contribution to the corporate goals, which will be at least partially conditioned by how they perceive their organization as a desirable place to work (Aiman-Smith et al. 2001).

Fourth sector organizations that have active SBMs should address the issue of the potential exploitation of their employees according to each organization's distinguishing characteristics. A non-market perspective must be adopted in the design of the BM in order to reinforce the sustainability of the company (Figge et al. 2002); the employees must share such a perspective. Some workers who come from more traditional profit-oriented firms may lack a pro-environmental and social attitude and find it difficult to integrate into the organization. It could be necessary for an organization to implement certain internal norms to institutionalize its SBM and guarantee that economic targets, as well as the desired social and environmental outcomes, are achieved.

In this context, fourth sector organizations that have developed SBMs in line with the interests and beliefs of their employees may use them as a valuable resource to generate a sustainable competitive advantage. In particular, there are firms that have assumed the integration of people with disabilities as a fundamental component of their mission without sacrificing profitability. In these circumstances, if a substantial part of the workforce is composed of people with disabilities, the alignment of their interests with those of the organization may result in a special relationship that will reinforce the sustainability of the BM.

3. SOLTRA: A Case Analysis of a Sustainable Business Model Built Around the Integration of People with Disabilities

3.1. Methodology and Company Overview

The present research is based on the case study methodology, which allows an in-depth analysis of companies in their natural state, as well as documenting their experiences, learning from the situation and building, improving or generating theories from it (Bonache 1999; Cepeda 2006; Yin 2014). In this sense, the methodological approach carried out in this case study analysis can be divided into two main stages. The first stage had a double objective: firstly, to identify the main studies on the conceptualization of SBM and its main characteristics and, secondly, to identify the main studies based on the theory of planned behaviour that analyse a company's intention to hire disabled people. The results derived from the literature review provided relevant information on SBM characteristics and helped identify the salient beliefs that might influence a company's intention to hire disabled people. This data, in turn, helped us to develop the measurement items for our study. In particular, aspects related to the theory of the planned behaviour, i.e. behavioural beliefs, normative beliefs and perceived behavioural control, were evaluated using measurement scales based on the works by Araten-Bergman (2016), Fraser et al. (2010, 2011), Hernandez et al. (2012), Jasper and Waldhart (2013) and McDonnall and Lund (2019). Furthermore, additional questions were designed to study issues concerning SOLTRA's SBM and its potential for generating a sustainable competitive advantage. Those questions were based on the concepts provided by Barney (2012), Barney and Wright (1998), Bocken et al. (2014) and Schaltegger et al. (2015).

The second stage involved gathering the necessary information about SOLTRA in order to develop the case study, define the company's actual SBM, explain how it is supported by the beliefs of the manager and determine how it created a sustainable competitive advantage within the framework of the resource-based view. To this end, semi-structured interviews were conducted between March and June of 2020 with SOLTRA's CEO and top managers from the operations and human resources departments. This information was complemented with information derived from the official web page of SOLTRA, some company official reports and the SABI database. Prior to the application of these in-depth interviews, a pre-test of the interview script was conducted in order to make sure that all the questions were clearly understood and no relevant aspects were missing.

SOLTRA is a Spanish limited liability company founded in León (Spain) in 2000 by the Catholic Dominican Order together with two agents: *Caja España*, a savings bank, and *Gureak Group*, a Basque business group that provides work opportunities to people with disabilities. The members as of December 2018 were the Dominican Order, which owned 62% of the company; the bank *Unicaja Banco* (17%); the investment group *Finaccess* (11%); and *Gureak* (3%). The rest of the shares were kept as treasury stock. SOLTRA was “founded with the aim of creating jobs for the collective of people with different capacities allowing them to participate in the efforts of companies and institutions for generating wealth” (SOLTRA n.d.-a). Jose Antonio Idoeta, CEO of SOLTRA, declared that it “is one of those companies that are able to focus their mission on people, on their human commitment, on inclusion through work” (SOLTRA 2019).

SOLTRA is a diversified organization with multiple unrelated businesses and numerous activities, which include (a) assembly and machining work (assembly of electrical and electronic components, quality control and rework, material coating, etc.), (b) logistics services (storage and maintenance, manipulation and labelling, metrology lab, etc.), (c) marketing services (mail campaigns, sample delivery, magazine bagging, etc.), (d) distribution (in collaboration with the supermarket chain *Eroski*), (e) industrial laundry (washing, ironing, repairing of garments, etc.), (f) cleaning (offices, shopping centres, schools, etc.) and (g) gardening (maintenance, pest control, tree pruning, etc.). Additionally, SOLTRA set up a foundation that runs an occupational centre, providing people with mental illness with the necessary resources to promote their autonomy, and a residence with 40 places that employs more than 25 professionals (caregivers, educators, occupational therapists, psychologists and social workers) (SOLTRA n.d.-b).

SOLTRA was set up in Spain and has gone through an internationalization process over the past few years (Denmark and Mexico), adapting successfully to different institutional contexts and diverse disability laws (Mukta 2016). Considering the average values for the period 2014–2018, SOLTRA had total assets of €10.97 million, total revenues of €18.34 million, an ROA of 7.87% and an ROE of 14.97%. SOLTRA had 412 workers in 2018, and 362 of them were people with different kinds of disabilities (32% intellectual, 31% physical, 12% sensory, 15% mental illness and 10% total permanent disability) (SOLTRA n.d.-a).

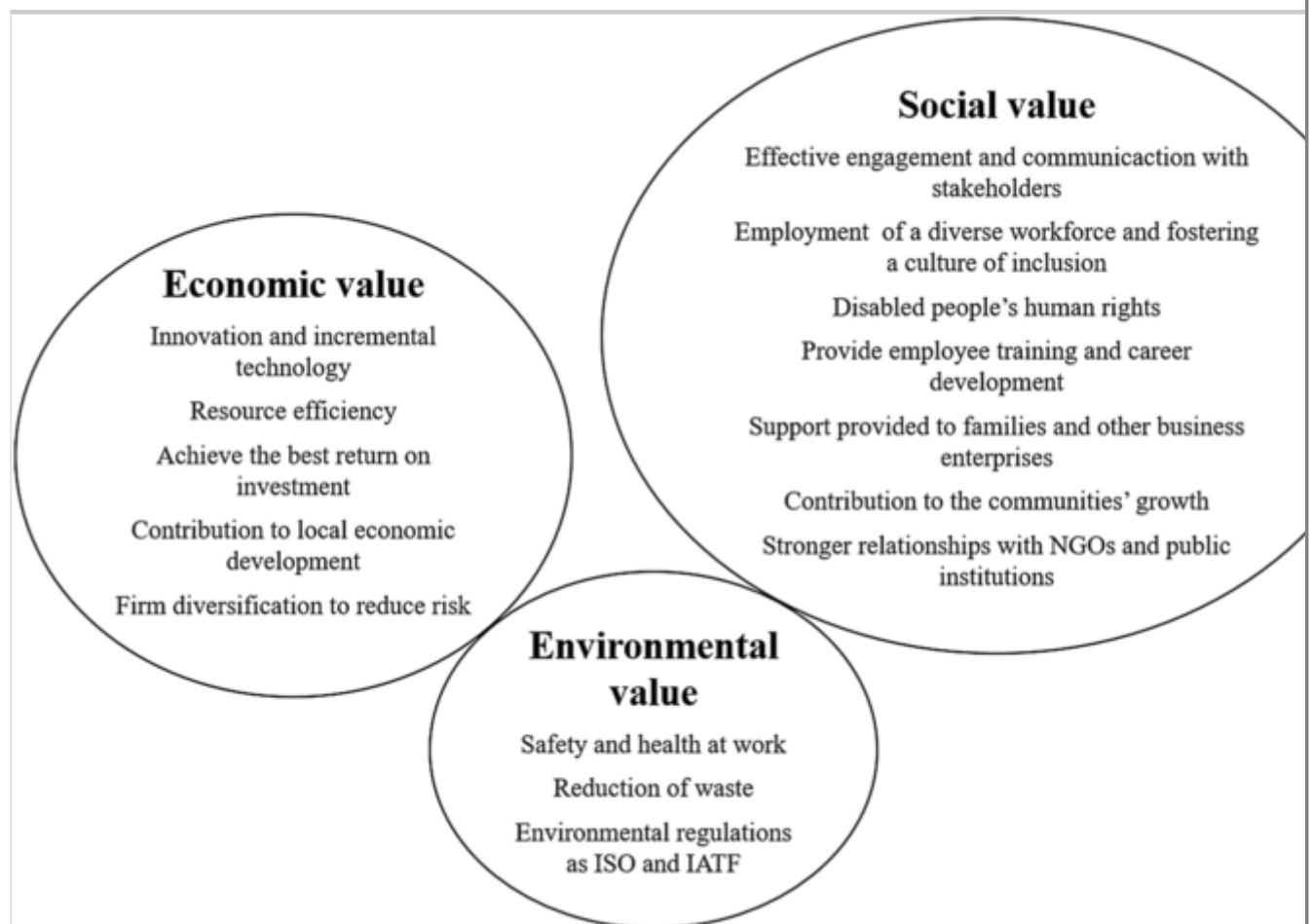
3.2. Analysis and Results

3.2.1. Company Sustainable Business Model

SOLTRA's BM is mainly based on social aspects. However, it has changed over the past 20 years in order to adapt to stakeholders' needs and claims. As we suggested in the theoretical framework, the concept of a BM can be interpreted as the way in which a company operates in order to reach its goals. This includes not only how goods are produced or services are provided but also how responsibilities are assigned, the legal and cultural norms affecting the company and the goals themselves. Although SOLTRA belongs to the fourth sector and social issues are paramount, environmental, economic and technological aspects are also essential to its competitiveness and sustainability, as represented in Fig. 1.

Fig. 1

SOLTRA's sustainable business model. Source: Own elaboration



In the opinion of SOLTRA's CEO, the BM of the company is characterized as follows:

Firstly, although the firm has tried to develop radical technology in the past, which, in some cases, has introduced a totally new design of a product and the use of cutting-edge technology, it usually generates incremental technology,

which implies a gradual adoption of new technology and the improvement of the existing technological process by new additions. Some of these technical and technological innovations are used to improve the managerial process, such as the installation of new software for management and control purposes that helps to improve the efficiency of the productive system. Other innovations focus on strengthening the quality of products and services. These new technological advances have allowed the company to meet the requirements of several quality norms, like ISO 9001/ISO 14001¹ and, more specifically, IATF 16949² for the automotive industry. Another important reason for emphasizing technology when defining the BM of the firm is the necessity of reducing incidences and adapting the workplace to the special requirements of employees with disabilities.

Secondly, although the CEO possesses more strategic information about the objectives of the company, and most of the workers' knowledge is limited to the tasks related to their position or department, the firm has made important efforts to improve internal communication. SOLTRA promotes holistic knowledge within the company so that everyone has a general idea of the business goals and activities carried out in the organization. To reinforce this holistic knowledge, the company has carried out some initiatives driven by the top management. The human resources department is in charge of executing these communication practices while the workers participate by making suggestions and proposals. The workers' representatives help identify the needs and interests of the employees, strengthen networking, encourage employee training and promote the implementation of new practices. In addition, the firm has created a new committee that serves as a place for open dialogue and fluid communication about how to put business policies into practice.

Thirdly, ambiguity about the BM and doubts about its potential profitability created some confusion during the first decade of the company's existence. Thus, while the owners preferred running a kind of NGO (nongovernmental organization), the top managers felt the business should be run in accordance with a traditional management model (mainly focused on maximizing financial performance) while keeping social and environmental concerns in mind. The proliferation of opportunities because of the involvement of employees with disabilities in the normal activities of the firm changed the initial BM. The firm has since discovered how to create new business opportunities through the integration of people with disabilities. In fact, it suggests that it has found more opportunities, thanks to the involvement of people with disabilities.

Fourthly, SOLTRA's BM is also environmentally oriented. The employees are fully aware of how important it is to take good care of the environment.

According to SOLTRA's CEO, after a few weeks of working for the company, workers with disabilities become more concerned about and involved with environmental issues. The BM is aimed at minimizing waste generation, and training and resources are provided to the staff to guarantee their active collaboration. In addition, an optimum control for hazardous waste has been established. The CEO has shown that people with disabilities are strict in their compliance with environmental regulations, which represents a strength of the company.

Based on the aforementioned pillars, SOLTRA has managed to cover all operational costs with the income obtained from its regular activity. In addition, SOLTRA's SBM addresses the majority of the concerns of its stakeholders (community, employees, customers, suppliers and so forth). In particular, the top managers at SOLTRA emphasized that the company obeys social laws (such as safety and health at work, minimum wage and maternity leave). These aspects help reinforce the company's profitability and reputation. Similarly, the stakeholders value the company's efforts to mitigate its environmental impact. The CEO stated that the current configuration of the company's BM allows SOLTRA to achieve its economic, social and environmental goals. The firm has found in workers with disabilities a vital asset for its BM. The managers mentioned that workers with higher disabilities constitute the cornerstone of the organization. Although they argued that workers with disabilities are equally important in all the business units of the company (laundry, gardening, assembly, etc.), they admitted that some positions require some adjustments according to their capabilities. Thus, one of the firm's mottos is "adapting the workstation and job functions to the person and not the other way around".

SOLTRA's BM changes slightly depending on the business unit. As mentioned above, SOLTRA operates unrelated businesses and numerous activities: assembly and machining work, logistics services, marketing services, distribution, industrial laundry, cleaning and gardening, besides the foundation (SOLTRA n.d.-b). The industrial area (assembly and machining work, logistic services and industrial laundry) is considered the strongest business unit of the company. Managing workers with disabilities often requires the standardization of practices and relations, and this aspect is particularly relevant in automotive activity because it involves a large number of manual activities. Nevertheless, there is no greater portion of workers with disabilities in this business unit than in the rest.

One-third of SOLTRA's total employees are composed of workers with intellectual disabilities. According to the CEO, these individuals need more support from the organization. This support helps to enhance the productivity of

these workers and, at the same time, creates a substantial social value, as will be explained in the sections below.

Finally, future changes in the BM will most likely involve reinforcing the occupational centre and entering a new sector activity (textile). These are expected to improve long-term profitability and social benefits.

In conclusion, although SOLTRA's SBM is mainly focused on social aspects due to its commitment to the employment of people with disabilities, it does not forget the other components of the triple bottom line. In fact, several environmental initiatives have been implemented, the success of which is enforced by the employees' behaviour. Similarly, as will be addressed below, its workforce, combined with some contextual and firm-specific characteristics, contributes to the creation of social value while generating a sustainable competitive advantage that increases profitability and guarantees the continuity of the firm. SOLTRA believes that its SBM can be applied not only by other companies but also by non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

3.2.2. Analysis of Managers' Beliefs Using the Theory of Planned Behaviour

As mentioned above, we used the theory of planned behaviour to analyse SOLTRA's intention to hire people with disabilities. This theory has been widely used and validated in different research fields to predict the intention to perform specific behaviours. The fact that the theory of planned behaviour can be applied to a wide range of behaviours is precisely what makes it so useful. In particular, within the scope of disability, there are several studies that address this research topic covering different issues (see, for example, Faulks et al. 2018; Jenkins and McKenzie 2011; Martin et al. 2011). However, as far as we know, there is a lack of work based on the theory of planned behaviour that analyses the intention of hiring people with disabilities.

The theory of planned behaviour establishes that human behaviour can be explained as "a function of salient information, or beliefs, relevant to the behavior" (Ajzen 1991, p. 189). In particular, this theory establishes that the immediate antecedent of a specific behaviour is the intention to carry out this behaviour. Moreover, this intention to perform the behaviour, in turn, is determined by three components: attitude towards the behaviour (i.e. the degree of positive or negative evaluation of the behaviour), the subjective norms (i.e. the perceived social pressure to perform the behaviour) and the perceived behavioural control (i.e. the perceived ability to carry out the behaviour) (Fraser et al. 2010). However, in this chapter, we focus on analysing the antecedents of

each of these components: behavioural beliefs, normative beliefs and control beliefs.

In general, behavioural beliefs refer to “the subjective probability that the behavior will produce a given (positive or negative) outcome or experience” (Ajzen n.d.-a, parag. 1). In particular, we focus on disability; therefore, for the purpose of the present study, this variable can be defined as beliefs about the expected positive or negative outcomes of hiring people with disabilities. As Fraser et al. (2010 p. 422) state, “when potential employers believe that hiring people with disabilities produces mainly positive outcomes, their attitudes toward this behavior will be favorable; but if they believe that hiring people with disabilities has mainly negative consequences, their attitudes will be unfavorable”.

Normative beliefs refer to “the likelihood that important referent individuals or groups approve or disapprove of performance a given behaviour” (Ajzen 1991, p. 195). In particular, in this chapter, this variable can be defined as the beliefs that particular referents (i.e. an individual’s supervisor, co-workers, upper-level managers, customers) do or do not support the hiring of disabled people.

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Finally, control beliefs have to do with “the presence or absence of requisite resources and opportunities that increase or reduce the perceived difficulty of performing a behaviour” (Ajzen 1991, p. 196). In this chapter, this variable can be defined as the perceived availability of resources, facilities and other factors required to hire people with disabilities.

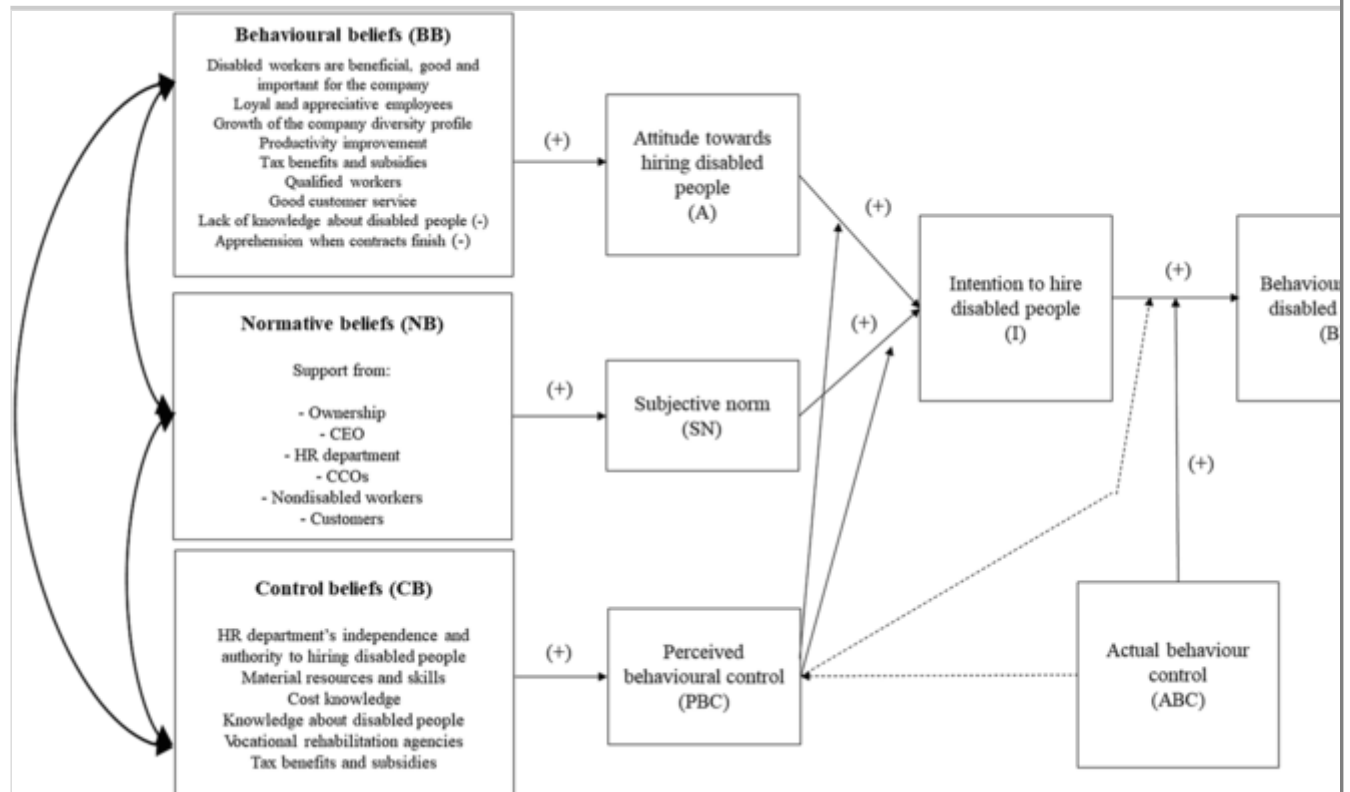
3.2.3. Behavioural Beliefs at SOLTRA

The results of the in-depth interviews show that hiring disabled people provides SOLTRA with loyal and appreciative employees who perform the same quantity and quality of work as nondisabled workers and provide customers with satisfactory service. They are also capable of successfully supervising other co-workers (Fig. 2). All of these perceptions are in line with the findings of Fraser et al. (2010, 2011), and McDonnall and Lund (2019). Furthermore, SOLTRA believes that hiring people with disabilities can be beneficial and important to the company as it can increase the company’s diversity profile, improve its productivity (which is inconsistent with the results of Jasper and Waldhart (2013)) and enable it to receive tax benefits and subsidies. However, SOLTRA also admits that, sometimes, hiring workers with disabilities can be a challenge due to a lack of knowledge about them and potential cost increases (but not income reductions). It is interesting to note that the latter perception is in

contrast to that of Fraser et al. (2010, 2011). Moreover, SOLTRA states that hiring disabled people makes it more sensitive when considering the termination of disabled people's contracts. However, SOLTRA does not believe that there is a higher likelihood of litigation due to dismissals or industrial accidents in such cases.

Fig. 2

The theory of planned behaviour applied to SOLTRA. Source: adapted from Ajzen (n.d.-b)



According to the SOLTRA's human resources department, the main advantage of a company reaching out to people with disabilities is the value creation. Disabled workers are highly capable of learning the different tasks their workplace entails, and, moreover, these workers are loyal and appreciative employees who are highly motivated, as echoed by Fraser et al. (2010, 2011). In contrast, the human resources department states that the main disadvantage of hiring disabled people involves having to adapt job positions. However, in this regard, the human resources representative emphasized that there is financial support for companies to carry out this kind of action, which makes hiring people with disabilities easier and consequently gives them an opportunity to access the labour market. In general, differences among SOLTRA's workers based on their type of disability do not seem to be recognized, although the company recognizes that workers with intellectual disabilities or mental illness usually require more individualized support.

3.2.4. Normative and Control Beliefs at SOLTRA

As it can be seen in Fig. 2, in general, both the human resources department and the CEO of SOLTRA believe that all the company stakeholders (shareholders, workers, customers, etc.) agree to hire people with disabilities. In particular, they emphasize the support given by the human resources department, the shareholders and workers' families. In fact, when asked about the stakeholders that might disapprove of hiring disabled people, they answered that none of the main SOLTRA's stakeholders disapproved. In this sense, there is a lack of consensus regarding this issue in the existing literature: these results support the results of Hernandez et al. (2012) and McDonnall and Lund (2019), but they are inconsistent with the findings derived from Fraser et al. (2010, 2011), which state that managers and co-workers are some of the barriers involved in hiring people with disabilities.

Regarding control beliefs (Fig. 2), a representative of SOLTRA's human resources department stated that she has the authority to hire people with disabilities and, in fact, she confirmed that it is up to her (and the human resources department) to do it. These same perceptions were also identified by Araten-Bergman (2016) and McDonnall and Lund (2019) as some of the most important control beliefs. Moreover, the human resources department pointed out that in order to reach out to disabled people, she counted on the commitment of the senior management. She agreed that it is easy for SOLTRA to hire people with disabilities because it has the required resources and skills to do so. She was aware of a number of vocational rehabilitation agencies and associations that send SOLTRA updated application profile lists. This means that SOLTRA knows where to find people with disabilities who are qualified applicants, and consequently, it has extensive knowledge of and information about workers with disabilities. It is interesting to note that these results conflict again with those of Fraser et al. (2010, 2011), who state that these are some of the main challenges that companies have to face when they want to hire disabled workers.

Furthermore, the representative from the human resources department stated that they are aware of the costs derived from the accommodation of workers with disabilities (which is the opposite of what Jasper and Waldhart (2013)) state in their study). At the same time, they feel this is not an important drawback due to the existence of tax benefits and subsidies related to the hiring of disabled people.

Apart from the factors previously mentioned, SOLTRA believes that performing a job position assessment that takes workers' disabilities into account, and considering it as an investment instead of a cost, makes it easier to reach out to

people with disabilities. Moreover, the idea that it is important to create job opportunities for people with disabilities is emphasized. Nevertheless, the existence of some factors that, in some way, can be seen as challenges of hiring people with disabilities, such as potential physical, postural and manipulative limitations, is acknowledged. These factors require the company to adapt the workplace or develop several job positions specific to individual ability to address positions that cannot be performed by disabled people, as found in Fraser et al. (2010, 2011) results.

There are some differences between SOLTRA and other more traditional businesses (which do not pursue social goals) in how they assess disabled people as potential candidates. SOLTRA's human resources department stated that the main difference is that SOLTRA has a strong belief that people with disabilities have professional qualifications and the skills required to perform a job position as successfully as a candidate without disabilities.

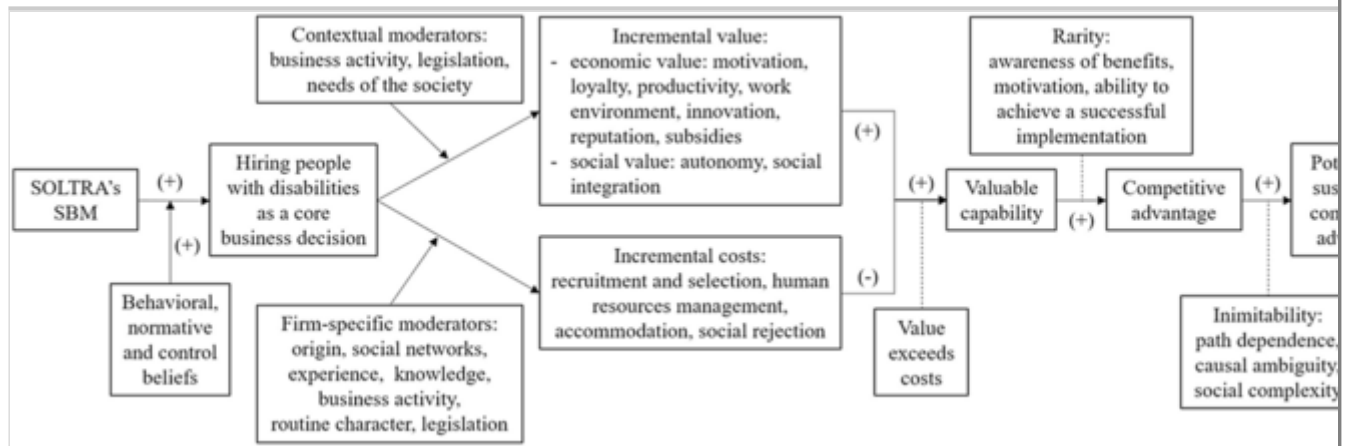
3.2.5. Sustainable Competitive Advantage

Figure 3 depicts a model inspired by that of Jones et al. (2018) within instrumental stakeholder theory and links SOLTRA's SBM to a sustainable competitive advantage. First, the definition of SOLTRA's SBM materializes into an actual recruitment policy that promotes hiring people with disabilities. This process is facilitated by the positive attitude of decision-makers, the pressure they feel from other groups and their perception of control. Thus, it is their behavioural beliefs, normative beliefs and control beliefs, as explained in detail above, that facilitate the successful implementation of an SBM focused on a workforce composed primarily of employees with disabilities. This is the origin of SOLTRA's sustainable competitive advantage.

Fig. 3

Linking SOLTRA's sustainable business model (SBM) to a sustainable competitive advantage. Source: adapted from Jones et al. (2018)

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The incremental value that is expected from this hiring policy is derived from three main sources. Firstly, benefits may come from having employees who are loyal to the organization, highly motivated and committed to their job (Dean 1988). This makes them especially efficient when their work requires repetitive manual tasks. Secondly, it usually implies an increase in the diversity of an organization, which results in an improved work environment and innovation (Henry et al. 2014). Thirdly, this hiring policy may facilitate access to public funding or subsidies, as well as new business deals (Shrey and Hursh 1999). Fourthly, a positive impact on the company's reputation may be expected (Siperstein et al. 2006). In addition to this economic value, there is also a social value that is created by giving many people who find it difficult to access a job the opportunity to gain economic self-reliance and to become better integrated into their communities. All the value added by the consideration of hiring people with disabilities as a core business decision is moderated by contextual factors, as stated below.

In this case, some of the economic value is dependent on the specific business activity, as it is reinforced if monotonous manual tasks are involved. Most of SOLTRA's employees (75%) work in two lines of business (assembly of electrical and electronic components and industrial laundry), which fulfil this requirement for value enhancing. On the other hand, the potential to exploit innovations in these activities where technological changes are more incremental than radical is reduced. The fact that the majority of SOLTRA's workforce is composed of people with disabilities defines a context in which advantages obtained through diversity are limited. Concerning the positive impact on the company's reputation, it would probably be rewarded with higher incomes if the products were sold to final consumers, but SOLTRA's competitive context is that of industrial goods and services.

Regarding the last source of economic value, according to Spanish legislation,³ companies with an average of 50 or more employees are required to maintain a

workforce in which at least 2% of workers have disabilities (with a disability rating of 33% or higher). They are offered the alternative of holding a commercial or civil contract with a special employment centre for the provision of goods and services. These special organizations must employ as many people with disabilities as possible, considering the nature of the operational activity, and people with disabilities must account for at least 70% of the workforce. They are also eligible for grants and subsidies that facilitate investments and reduce labour costs. SOLTRA meets the requirements to be considered a special employment centre. It, therefore, has an advantaged position which adds economic value through new business opportunities and public funding. These resources are available to this type of organization exclusively and represented 8% of its total income (García-Rodríguez 2019).

Concerning the social value, it is amplified when the number of people with disabilities who require a job is high and their needs are not properly attended to. As we noted at the beginning of this chapter, that is the general situation in many parts of the world, including Spain. Job creation for disabled people benefits not only the employees, who are now able to live a more autonomous life, but also their families and society in general, which becomes more inclusive and enjoys an enriched relationship among members. In addition, social aid funds are less necessary. Despite the difficulty of quantifying the social value of organizations like SOLTRA, it is estimated that every single euro received from the government through subsidies or social security contributions is paid back to society 3.7 times over (García-Rodríguez 2019).

While hiring people with disabilities may generate incremental value, as we have explained, some costs may increase as well. Firstly, the recruitment and selection process may be a challenge because finding qualified applicants with disabilities is complicated and costly (Hernandez et al. 2000). In addition, once they are in the company, the human resources department must have enough knowledge about people with disabilities to implement specific policies and practices to guarantee their complete and efficient integration into the organization (Cavanagh et al. 2017). These decisions may imply a redistribution of duties and responsibilities among the employees as well as a physical transformation of some posts in order to adapt them to the characteristics of individual workers (Chirikos 1999). Finally, workers with disabilities may not be accepted by their co-workers, or they may even make customers feel uncomfortable, which may consequently damage productivity and revenue (Colella and Bruyère 2011; Vornholt et al. 2013).

Some specific characteristics of a firm that opts to hire people with disabilities as a core business decision may moderate the impact of this decision on the

incremental costs. SOLTRA is an organization founded with the initial purpose of providing a job opportunity to people with disabilities. These individuals have made up the majority of the workforce since the very beginning. SOLTRA subsequently possesses valuable knowledge about their characteristics, needs and potential. Moreover, SOLTRA is well known for its role in raising awareness about the general need of integrating people with disabilities into their local community and maintains contact with many of them who live nearby and their families. Consequently, it is relatively easy for SOLTRA to find qualified applicants with disabilities. In fact, SOLTRA works as a vocational rehabilitation agency, providing new employees to other companies.

Policies and decisions made by SOLTRA's human resources department are specially adapted to the nature of the main workforce, and what might be considered exceptional in other companies is considered normal practice. Furthermore, the costs of accommodation are significant as a comprehensive selection of business activities to address the needs and potential of the employees was previously carried out, and the entire operational process was initially designed with the characteristics of the potential employees in mind. Finally, major issues among the employees due to their physical or mental conditions are unlikely as they are part of the daily nature of the company activity. They are no longer considered limitations because the work environment emphasizes the exploitation of the different abilities that each worker possesses. As for relationships with clients, these should not be affected as SOLTRA's employees do not have any contact with the final customers, and the businesses that deal with it base their decision on the objective economic interest and the need to meet the legal requirements mentioned above.

According to the circumstances reviewed so far, it can be concluded that SOLTRA's SBM, which is based on a determined decision to hire people with disabilities, is likely to generate benefits that exceed the incremental costs. In our review, we have addressed the "valuable" criterion of the resource-based view (Barney 2012; Barney and Wright 1998). Estimating the actual value of this capability is problematic as it is very difficult to measure the social value added by the company. Although this social value can be considered as a positive externality by nature and may not have any impact on the firm's profitability, it must be observed that generating social value is an essential part of the organization's mission. Its attainment goes hand in hand with the goal of economic survival.

As it can be observed in Fig. 3, once a capability exists, according to the resource-based view, it is likely to lead to long-term superior firm performance

if two conditions are met: being rare and inimitable (Barney 2012; Barney and Wright 1998).

First, being rare means that just a few firms possess certain capability. Chen (1996) proposes that the main reasons for existing scarce capabilities are that many companies are just not aware of the benefits that can be obtained; they lack the necessary motivation to develop them because, for instance, the benefits materialize in the long run; and they are unable to successfully implement the right and necessary decisions. All of these circumstances seem to be present in the capability of generating net value by considering hiring people with disabilities as a core business decision. For many years, SOLTRA has been able to see something that others are still reluctant to admit or are now just starting to perceive, which is the tremendous contribution of workers with disabilities to the success of a business. Furthermore, SOLTRA's close connection with people with disabilities makes it fully aware of how they struggle to integrate into their communities. Consequently, SOLTRA is also aware of the social benefits derived from its business activity. Providing an opportunity for people with disabilities to gain autonomy by offering them a job in an organization that is economically sustainable, thanks to their contribution, is the motivation that justified SOLTRA's foundation, and that is hard to find in other organizations, which are more short term oriented and solely focused on economic profitability. Finally, the strategic decision that defines a BM is not easily implemented due to the complexity that is inherent in managing a non-conventional organization like SOLTRA.

Second, inimitability has to do with the way a firm's resources develop over time (path dependence), how difficult it is to know what causes its competitive strengths (causal ambiguity) and how difficult it is to replicate complex social phenomena (social complexity) (Barney 1991, 2012). SOLTRA's current human resources management is based on relationships with employees that have evolved for a considerable time. Besides, outsiders cannot easily understand the extent to which these relationships are related to SOLTRA's sustainable competitive advantage. Even if they did, the social complexity of these relationships makes them difficult to replicate.

4. Conclusion

SOLTRA was created with the goal of improving the social and employability conditions of people with disabilities. The firm has managed to stay profitable and sustain itself over time while maintaining its focus on its social purpose. Over the past 20 years, the firm has adjusted its BM to become a fourth sector organization. Nowadays, it is a firm that generates new opportunities through the

consideration of social, environmental and economic issues. It is clear that people with disabilities are the cornerstone of the company.

In this chapter, using the theory of planned behaviour and the resource-based view, we have detailed the main factors that have allowed SOLTRA to become an example of a fourth sector organization. In particular, the way in which people with disabilities have been integrated into the company, the fact that these workers constitute a potential resource to drive a long-term competitive advantage and the role played by the main salient beliefs (i.e. behavioural beliefs, normative beliefs and control beliefs) were discussed as aspects that have constituted a great challenge to the firm. SOLTRA has been working to integrate these points into its BM, trying to achieve social and labour market inclusion for disabled people through promotion, education and rehabilitation.

Nowadays, SOLTRA's BM is focused on incremental technology that helps to improve the production process by improving the workplace, increasing the total tasks that people with disabilities can perform and discovering new tasks that disabled people can do better. In addition, SOLTRA's BM pays particular attention to knowledge and the way it flows within the firm. It is trying to establish a holistic knowledge culture by creating a new department that will be in charge of generating relevant information about the opportunities and threats faced by SOLTRA and sharing this information among employees. Moreover, one of the key aspects of SOLTRA's BM is the capacity to create business opportunities through the integration of social and environmental issues (e.g. new market niches, new products or services, new materials and resources and new processes, among others). In particular, disabled workers are more efficient at particular tasks (usually manual tasks) than non-disabled workers. They also share environmental concerns, contribute to a better social firm climate that improves the integration of new workers, help to improve company productivity and really engage with the firm objectives.

Our findings may have important implications for managers, NGOs, citizens and policymakers. We believe that our research is especially timely in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and answers the call of the United Nations Environment Assembly for citizens and decision-makers to become more sensitive to sustainability and to achieving its sustainable development goals.

Firstly, the negative effects of the lockdown might reduce employment rates and sales figures and increase difficulties faced by firms and society. This is especially worrying for vulnerable individuals. Citizens with disabilities have often suffered discrimination when they have tried to find a job, and this difficulty has only increased during the COVID-19 crisis. In this sense, it is

important to highlight that the actions developed by SOLTRA have had several implications not only for disabled people but also for their families. The fact that these people have a job allows their families to have more free time to find employment and increases household income. All of the aforementioned contribute to the quality of life of these citizens. In addition, disabled people who find a job usually improve their social relationships, gain economic and personal independence and increase their sense of community.

Secondly, although many firms from different sectors have increased their social and environmental activities to achieve a triple bottom line outcome over the past few years, most of them have just paid more attention to these problems while continuing to operate as traditional firms. SOLTRA's BM serves as an example of how firms can integrate social and environmental activities in their business core to generate new business opportunities. Although SOLTRA pays particular attention to the social sphere through the inclusion of workers with disabilities, it has also found business opportunities in environmental areas. Managers might consider modifying their workforce or making the resources used or the method of production more efficient. In this sense, it can be stated that SOLTRA's BM is based on three main pillars that other firms can easily imitate: the introduction of incremental technology, the generation of holistic knowledge in the firm and the use of social and environmental problems as an inspiration to develop new activities and implement courageous business policies that add economic as well as social value and contribute to the sustainability of the company.

Thirdly, NGOs can view SOLTRA as an example of how companies can contribute to society while remaining financially independent. It has been demonstrated that traditional NGOs are not sufficient to satisfy the soaring social problems of society on their own. Although most NGOs are necessary due to the social objectives that they achieve, in some cases, they are unable to survive in the current form. Society demands new solutions that require more effective actions, which include higher interdisciplinarity. Furthermore, higher involvement and stronger alliances between NGOs and other agents, such as firms and public organizations, are required. The increasing number of collaborations between SOLTRA and NGOs serves as an example of how an NGO can achieve its purpose and be profitable, or at least financially independent, at the same time. Although SOLTRA mainly collaborates with NGOs involving disabled people, it also pays attention to other social NGOs and public agents. This constitutes another advantage of its BM. NGOs must complement or contribute to the objectives of other organizations to achieve social purposes in an effective manner.

Finally, policymakers can especially benefit from the actions undertaken by firms like SOLTRA. Public agents at the local or regional level are usually responsible for addressing social problems in the first place. However, designing appropriated policies to solve these problems involves the national and international spheres. In this sense, these agents are becoming aware of the positive impact that fourth sector firms might have by addressing social problems in a more efficient way. Policymakers should incentivize the proliferation of this kind of firm. They could, for instance, offer financial support or tax benefits to set up new firms or restructure established companies to integrate social and environmental objectives into their core business.

SOLTRA contributes to society by hiring people with disabilities. In this way, it is able to generate economic outcomes, including tax payments derived from its activity, increased income for households with disabled family members and improvement in the economic outcomes of the territory. In addition, due to its social purpose, its social benefits are countless (higher equity, inclusion and diversity, higher awareness of disability, social interactions, family independence, etc.). This type of firm also provides several environmental benefits because it usually pursues a triple bottom line outcome. From this perspective, policymakers can utilize these tools to promote and reinforce the establishment of fourth sector firms to solve social problems and generate sustainable environments.

Some limitations should be noted about the present study. Firstly, although we collected detailed information about SOLTRA, it is not possible to extrapolate our results to other firms due to the specific characteristics and context which surround this kind of firm. Secondly, this study focuses on the company's BM and the salient beliefs that might influence the hiring of disabled people from a manager's point of view. However, the workers' perceptions of these issues could also be analysed to gain a deeper understanding of how a fourth sector firm really works. Thirdly, it would be interesting to explore the heightened environmental awareness of fourth sector firms and how they might serve as a reference for other firms and managers regarding environmental issues. In this sense, an in-depth analysis could be carried out to develop a better understanding of the company's environmental policies and how they are perceived by both the managers and the workers. Finally, although we interviewed the CEO and top managers in SOLTRA's operations and human resources departments in Spain, it would be interesting to explore regional differences between SOLTRA's operations in Denmark, Mexico and Spain, the three countries in which SOLTRA has a strong presence.

Looking to future research, it would be interesting to explore whether the above pattern can be applied in other organizations or if other organizations apply similar patterns. In this sense, the characteristics of the firms should be considered. The BM of a firm might differ significantly depending on the size of organization, the board composition and the location of the firm. In addition, it could be interesting to analyse the characteristics of fourth sector firms that are equally involved in social, environmental and economic issues, i.e. organizations that pursue a triple bottom line and achieve similar results in all the categories.

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1

ISO 9001: An international standard that focuses on all the elements of quality management that a company must have in order to have an effective system to manage and improve the quality of its products or services. ISO 14001: Internationally accepted standard that indicates how to implement

an effective environmental management system. It is designed to help organizations remain commercially successful without overlooking their environmental responsibilities.

2

IATF 16949: Quality Management System (QMS) standard specific to the automotive industry which is based on the international standard for Quality Management Systems according to ISO 9001.

3

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