A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND INNOVATION

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ABSTRACT

Innovation and sustainable development are major contemporary issues. Innovation represents an important tool for achieving corporate social responsibility while sustainable development is a challenge for business and emphasises the direction that innovation activities can take. The objective of this contribution is to specify innovation and social responsibility outlines and to propose a conceptual framework of their complementarity in a small and medium enterprise perspective. This approach enables us to reflect on the role of innovation in responsible entrepreneurship by illustrating a scheme which brings together these concepts in an integrated approach.

JEL: M10, M14, O32

KEYWORDS: Sustainability, CSR, Innovation, Small business

INTRODUCTION

The problem of sustainable development is not new. In 1987, the Commission of the United Nations, chaired by Gro Harlem Brundtland, redefined the concept of ecodevelopment, now called sustainable development (Mathieu, 2005). Sustainable development has proved to be a way of responding to socio-economic and ecological crises of development in economies and society as well as to new needs that may arise. The problem of sustainable development was integrated into the microeconomics sphere and has been associated with smaller organizations such as enterprises (Mathieu, 2005). After large enterprises, SMEs became more aware of the impact their activities could have on sustainable development (CIDD, 2006; Spence et al., 2007). Many scientific and public communications on corporate social responsibility show interest in sustainable development and highlight the benefits of sustainable strategies (Quairel and Auberger, 2005).

On the other hand, companies also became aware of the utility of good innovation management which can allow them to strengthen their position in their market (Thouvenin, 2002; Tidd et al., 2006). Many managers are confronted with the necessity of developing new technologies, new products or new organizations. By being innovative, these businesses would be more suitable to meet the needs of new competitiveness (Carrier and Garand, 1996; Hoffman et al., 1998).

Having recognized the benefits of innovation for the business, it seems the innovation approach can be associated with that of corporate social responsibility (CSR). These two problems can be complementary in an organization. Thus, sustainable development can offer business opportunities and numerous occasions to innovate (EC, 2007; CST, 2001). Furthermore, sustainable development can introduce numerous improvements in the modes of consumption, production and organization (CST, 2001).

The literature on innovation, sustainable development and CSR is abundant and varied, underlining the interest they have excited over several years (Carrier et Garand, 1996; Laville, 2009). Regarding the complementarity of innovation and CSR activities, there is little work on their interaction, on how innovation can support CSR, in particular, far as SMEs are concerned (Mendibil et al., 2007).

This contribution thus has as its objective to suggest a first review of the literature in order to highlight the complementarity of research issues on CSR and innovation. It also aims at identifying their main characteristics in a context of the SME. We present a conceptual framework adapted to considerations of this double issue.

To begin, we define the small and medium-sized enterprise and shall precisely identify its specifics. We analyse the field of CSR and the stakeholder theory. We also show the central role of the manager in an SME as well as its sustainable commitment through the theory of planned behavior. Next, we develop the concept of innovation and the conditions in which it can facilitate and promote CSR. On this basis, we introduce a conceptual framework based on some theoretical and empirical research that will help us understand the role of innovation in responsible entrepreneurship as well as its implementation better. These various concepts will be shown diagrammatically in an integrated approach.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In Europe and in many countries of the world, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) represent an important economic element. These SMEs may represent more than 95% of enterprises (Fillion, 2007). There are no less than twenty million SMEs in Europe, which represent a crucial social component by creating jobs, the production of products and services to society, and the contribution of these companies to fiscal receipts (EC, 2004; Fillion, 2007). SMEs are particular firms. They differ from large enterprises mainly, but not only, by their governance and their structure.

Specificities and Definitions of SMEs

The specificities of SMEs were widely studied by Torrès (2007). Torrès uses the concept of proximity to explain specific behaviors of small business managers. He argued the SME can be considered as "a mix of proximity which creates the necessary conditions for action and reflection in a small organization" (Torres, 2007, p. 24). These proximities include hierarchical proximity, functional proximity, information systems of proximity, temporal proximity, marketing proximity, etc.

According to Torres (2007, p. 25), there is a more important hierarchical proximity in SMEs than in large enterprises. "The greater centralization of power in the hands of the owner-manager can only take place under conditions of close proximity, and in a relatively compact structure". Moreover, function by function analysis is often inappropriate in the case of SMEs. Owner-managers are usually very flexible and can support multiple functions (Torres, 2007). In SMEs, there is usually simple, internal communication and little structure because managers opt for more informal, primarily oral communications (Torres, 2007). In addition, SMEs usually consider a short-term perspective. Strategic behavior is reactive rather than anticipative (Torres, 2007). Lastly, small business trading areas covers a limited space on a local or regional scale. This limited scope encourages closer contacts and links between managers and their stakeholders. This proximity allows managers to meet the needs of their customers more easily and to implement custom marketing (Torres, 2007).

When we speak about small and medium-sized enterprises, it is not obvious which kind of firm we are referring to. Indeed, in an empirical review of authors, we see that authors do not consider all SMEs in the same way. Most authors define SMEs which they analyze according to the quantitative criteria of the number of workers in the enterprise. According to Faber (1999), this quantitative approach makes it possible to identifythe notion of SME more quickly and easily. Other authors, such as Witterwulghe (1998), propose a definition of the SME by complementing a quantitative approach and qualitative criteria. We retain two definitions which which are references within the scientific community. We privilege the quantitative and qualitative approaches by taking into account the definition of the European

Commission (EC, 2006) on the one hand and the definition (2004) of Research Group in Economy and Business of SMEs, Groupe de Recherche en économie et gestion des PME (GREPME) on the other hand.

The European definition is based on quantitative criteria. This definition distinguishes three categories of enterprises and takes into account three criteria: enrolment, annual turnover, and the annual balance sheet. Small business is then defined as an enterprise which employs fewer than 250 persons and whose annual turnover does not exceed 50 million euro or whose total balance sheet does not exceed 43 million euros (EC, 2006).

The definition of the GREPME (1994) takes into account additional more qualitative criteria. This qualitative approach puts the human factor first. According to this definition, an enterprise is an SME if it meets the criteria of small, centralized management, low specialization (Executive and staff), simple or scarcely organized systems of internal and external information and intuitive or little formalized strategy.

From Sustainable Development to Corporate Social Responsibility

Sustainable development is a vague notion which corresponds to the concept: development meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Brundtland, 1987). It is based on three poles of activities, also theoretically named as a triple bottom line: results of the firm in terms of planet (respect for the environment), people (respect for employees, customers, suppliers, stakeholders and society) and profit (profitability and growth of the enterprise and growth of the economy) (CIDD, 2006; Labelle, 2008; Laville, 2009; Spence, 2007).

An extension of sustainable development involves the concept of responsible entrepreneurship which means strategies voluntarily adopted by companies to contribute to sustainable development (EC, 2004, p. 5). This definition meets the concept of corporate social responsability (CSR) which represents, according to the CIDD (2006, p. 7), “an improvement process in which companies incorporate voluntarily, systematically and consistently social, environmental and economic considerations into their management in consultation with their stakeholders”.

In a similar sense, CSR requires a long term perspective without neglecting short-term requirements (CIDD, 2006). In this perspective, it refers to companies that incorporate their corporate social responsibility in their strategy and their management (CIDD, 2006).

According to many authors, the three profitabilities (social, environmental and economic) related to CSR should not be considered in isolation. These three dimensions need to be invested in simultaneously and consistently by the company. It must try to harmonise these three dimensions that may be complementary or in opposition (CIDD, 2006; Dion et al. 2008). However, in our approach, we consider that an enterprise does not necessarily consider the three pillars of CSR in the same way. We believe that responsible investment may vary from one company to another. Indeed, a firm will generally aim primarily to meet its financial interests. The economic pillar should therefore usually precede the other two pillars (social and environmental). While respecting its profitability requirements, the company can therefore choose to invest in the social and/or environmental. It is only by long-term commitment to the three pillars that one can then talk of corporate social responsibility.

In addition, the managers of SMEs’ initiatives may be motivated by internal and external factors, that is to say positive pressure from stakeholders to get involved in more responsible behavior (CIDD, 2006; Dejean and Gond, 2004; Spence et al., 2007). Indeed, to be more efficient at three dimensions of sustainable profitability, a company must be attentive to the needs and wishes of stakeholders and to the community in which it is established (CIDD, 2006). These internal and external pressures come from different actors such as consumers, staff of the enterprise, local communities, suppliers, NGOs, etc. (EC, 2004; Spence et al. 2007).

First, the responsible manager must pay attention to the wishes of consumers (EC, 2004; Dejean and Gond, 2004). These can be sensitised by NGOs and the media about the manufacturing conditions of products and their more environmentally friendly production (CIDD, 2006; Dejean and Gond, 2004). On the other hand, the manager must motivate and involve staff in business development and innovation activities with training and personal development opportunities. Therefore, an enterprise should worry about health, safety and general well-being of employees (EC, 2004).

The responsible manager must also meet the needs of its customers, business partners and competitors in fairness and honesty (EC, 2004). In addition, the corporate procurement policy is also concerned by sustainable development. The companies have got to choose good suppliers (local vendors) (Spence, 2007). The relations with their subcontractors enable them to condition their purchases to social, environmental and economic criteria. In addition, some large non-governmental organizations regularly communicate information about methods of governance of companies in order to solicit and mobilise the entreprises to many societal requirements (Dejean and Gond, 2004). However, these positive pressures complement also negative pressures that can be linked to companies's irresponsible social behavior, like for example environmental scandals or child labor. These negative pressures can therefore also be the source of the implementation of responsible practices (CIDD, 2006).

<u>Willingness of the Manager and the Theory of Planned Behavior</u>

Sustainable development strategies are generally implemented by SMEs conducted by visionary and determined entrepreneurs (CIDD, 2006; Spence, 2007). It should be noted that initiatives of a visionary entrepreneur do not aim just to comply with the regulatory measures in force, but rather voluntarily to go beyond the minimum requirements imposed by law (EC, 2004; CIDD, 2006). The values, beliefs and personal ethical convictions of these managers, passed on to their organization's employees, are essential in steps taken by SMEs and have resulted in the development of these responsible practices (CIDD, 2006; Spence, 2007). This logic invests employees in a mission of corporate citizenship. In addition, although the primary objective is not necessarily the performance, small business benefits from the positive effect on employee morale and motivation (CBSR, 2003; Spence, 2007)).

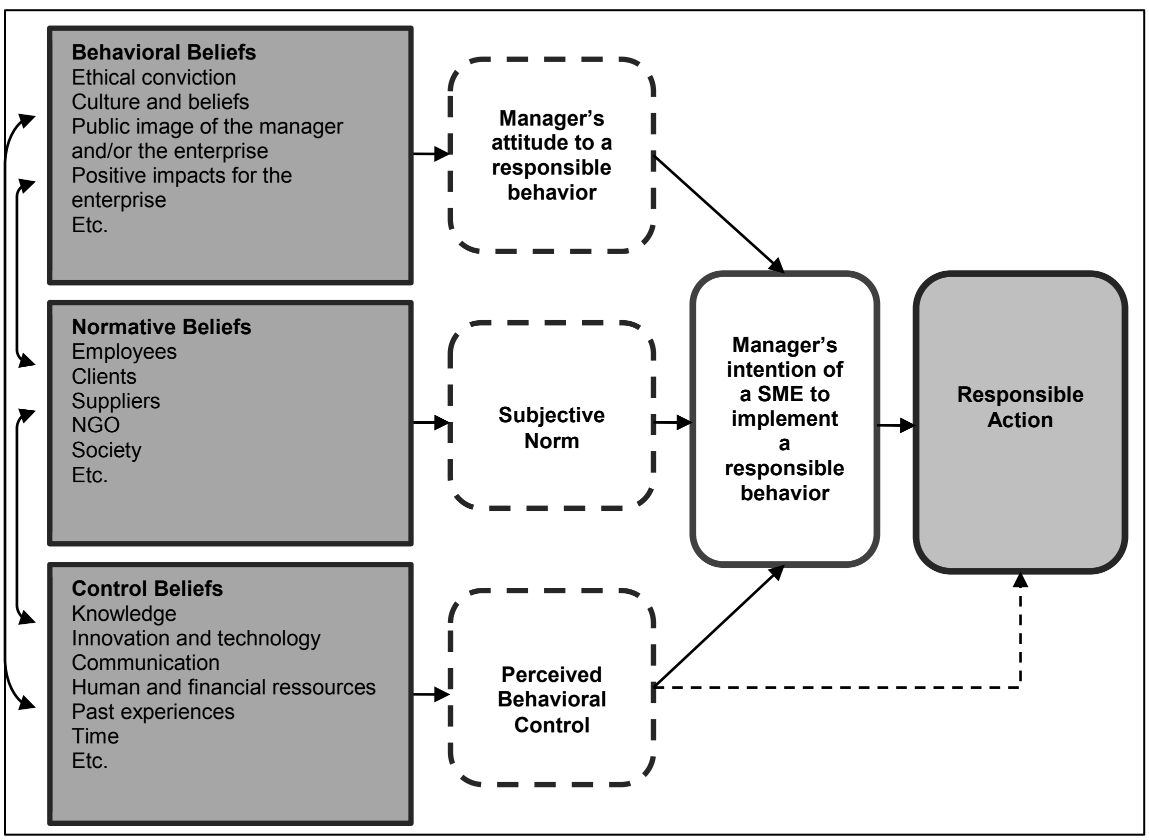
Among other theories of behavior and intentions, the theory of reasoned action (TRA) and the theory of planned behavior (TPB) have been widely applied in areas such as consumer choice, ethical trade, the protection of the environment, etc. (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen and driver, 1992). Models of these theories can explain the intentions of managers to engage in practices of CSR (Wu, Auld and Lloyd, 2008). They are seeking to explain both informational and motivational influences on the behavior (Conner and Armitage, 1998) as well as to predict and understand individual behavior.

According to the TRA, people usually behave in accordance with their intentions (Ajzen and driver, 1992, Boulanger, 2008; Conner and Armitage, 1998). These intentions are also based on two major factors: an individual factor and a social factor (Boulanger, 2008). The attitude of the person (personal factor) is one of the dictators of intentions of a given behavior (behavioral beliefs), which is the positive or negative assessment this person attaches to this behavior (Ajzen and Driver, 1992, Boulanger, 2008; Conner and Armitage, 1998). The TRA also specifies subjective norms as a determinant of behavioral intentions. These subjective norms represent the social factor (Ajzen and driver, 1992, Boulanger, 2008; Conner and Armitage, 1998). These subjective norms correspond to our perception of what people think of the achievement of such behavior.

TPB (Ajzen, 1991) is an extension of the TRA in which a supplementary determinant has been added. Indeed, the TPB incorporates additional perceived behavioral control and its impact on intentions and actions (Ajzen and driver, 1992, Boulanger, 2008; Conner and Armitage, 1998). Perceived behavioral control corresponds to the person's perception as to how easy or difficult it would be to accomplish a particular (time, money, skills, etc.). According to this theory, perceived control as well as intention of action can be directly used to predict outcome of the behavior (Ajzen and driver, 1992). In addition, the direct link between perceived behavioral control and the outcome of behavior can also be explained by the fact that the perceived behavioral control can often be used as a substitute for the current control measure (Ajzen and driver, 1992).

In this way, behavioral intentions depend on three direct determinants: attitudes, subjective norms and the perception of behavioral control. In Figure 1, we show that beliefs concerning sustainable behavior by a small business manager produce a favourable or unfavourable attitude towards this behavior. Normative beliefs result from perception of social pressures or subjective norms. These normative beliefs correspond to the stakeholders's perception of responsible behavior of a small business manager. Control beliefs depend on the perceived behavioral control. Perception of a manager'control refers to the perception of his capacity (human and financial resources, time, etc.) to implement responsible behavior. Finally, by giving adequate current behavior control, the manager expects to carry out his intention when opportunity arises. Attitudes towards behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, lead to formation of behavioral intentions. Thus the intention immediately precedes the behavior. Nevertheless, many behaviors imply difficult implementations, and therefore can limit their own control. It is therefore useful to consider the perceived control with the intention.

Figure 1: TPB Adapted from Ajzen (1991) and Wu et al. (2008)



This figure provides potential indicators for three levels of belief. It shows how the manager's attitude to a responsible behavior, the subjective norm and his perceived behavioral control lead to intention and to implementation of a responsible action.

Place of Innovation in the Implementation of CSR

Innovation is a complex phenomenon which can be apprehended in various forms (Halilem and St-Jean, 2007). It is useful to clarify the outlines of the concept of innovation because many ambiguities exist as to its definition (Carrier and Garand, 1996). However, innovation can usually be defined as "the implementation of a product (good or service) or a new or significantly improved process, a new method of marketing or a new organizational method in the business, the workplace organization or the external relations" (OECD, 2005, p. 54).

The definition of innovation, from the latest edition of the Oslo Manual (OECD, 2005), clarifies that it includes innovative activity because it refers to "implementation" of creativity, and not creativity itself. Carrier and Garand (1996) pointed out confusion that may exist between creativity and innovation. Moreover, this distinction has often been questioned, notably by Mansfield (1968), Pierce and Delbecq (1977) or Schumaan (1982). According to these authors, creativity (or invention) corresponds to the initial discovery of new ideas which can cause a process of innovation. It is therefore necessary to distinguish between creativity and innovation, considering them as two distinct phases of an enchainement which creativity is the starting point and innovation the completion.

In addition, it is not always easy to distinguish between change and innovation. Indeed, the implementation of innovation (linked to the introduction of new) systematically brings about a change for the enterprise while the company can achieve an organistional change without necessarily implying innovation (Carrier and Garand, 1996; Halilem and St-Jean, 2007). Carrier and Garand (1996) emphasis the fact that, in literature, we find different ways of assessing innovation: the relative perception of the adopter, objective novelty, the degree of intensity and the nature and extent of induced change. In this paper, we distinguish between innovation and change in an enterprise by taking into account the relative perception of the enterprise. Thus, the change in the organization is considered an innovation if it is seen as new by the enterprise actors.

Innovation and CSR are two major contemporary issues (Labelle, 2008). They "can and should be mutually reinforcing" because the future economy is based on their complementarity (CST, 2001, p. 1). In combining both, we note that governance oriented to sustainable development favors innovation (Labelle, 2008). Innovation therefore represents an indispensable tool to the implementation of CSR while sustainable development is a challenge for the enterprise and highlights the direction that innovative activities can take (CST, 2001). Nevertheless, according to CST (2001), innovation and sustainable development were not always considered complementary realities. While innovation has always represented an indispensable tool for enterprises looking for growth, sustainable development perception has not always been positive and represented for some people an obstacle to economic growth. However, today, there is no question of opposition between these two approaches because businesses are regularly becoming more open-minded towards sustainable development.

Increasingly, studies explore the link between innovation and CSR (CST, 2001; Labelle, 2008; MacGregor et al., 2007a; MacGregor et al., 2007b). In addition, some authors are interested in the direction of innovation - sustainable development trajectory (EC, 2007; MacGregor et al., 2007b). In the framework of the European Commission's *Response project* (EC, 2007) the objective of which is to persuade SMEs to implement corporate social responsibility in the enterprise through the use of innovation activities, MacGregor and al. (2007b) highlight the dual direction that innovation and corporate social responsibility can take. Two trajectories have thus been put forward. First, in some firms a CSR, innovation trajectory, has been found which is explained by the fact that enterprises are driven primarily by values. These firms take into account the significant impact of their activities on the environment and the community. This does not mean, however, these companies lose sight of profit. On the other hand, the innovation CSR trajectory is present in entreprises conducted mainly by the creation of value. They develop their labor force, their production chain, and their customers, and continually invest in them to create added value (EC, 2007). The CST (2001) also highlights this dual trajectory. For the CST (2001), science and innovation constitute an essential lever to sustainable development, but sustainable development can also stimulate innovation, and thereby promote social progress and economic growth.

Thus, the entrepreneur, as Schumpeter suggested in 1934, is an innovator. Sustainable development provides the responsible entrepreneur with opportunities to innovate and meet the considerations of the various parties concerned by improvements of consumption, production and current organizational modes (CST, 2001; MacGregor et al, 2007b; Spence, 2007). Nowadays, an innovative SME must take into account the social and environmental impact of its processes of production, in stimulating the creativity of employees and by collaborating with customers and other business partners (MacGregor et al., 2007a).

SMEs can then expect added value from their sustainable innovative activities which is not only centered on financial performance (MacGregor et al., 2007b). The most innovative and proactive firms are the most capable at incorporating sustainable development's activities in their growth strategies (EC, 2002; Spence, 2007). Like innovation, a proactive approach is also beneficial to the establishment of a CSR policy that can bring value to the enterprise (EC, 2002; MacGregor et al., 2007a; MacGregor et al., 2007b). Indeed, although a reactive approach of CSR (responses to pressures) can lead to short-term profits, a proactive approach (integration in business strategy) may cause more sustainable innovations (Mendibil et al., 2007). Proactive SMEs do not wait for pressure from stakeholders to demonstrate their corporate social responsibility; they work continuously for more responsible solutions (Quairel and Auberger, 2005; MacGregor et al., 2007a). It appears the relationship between CSR and innovation is most marked in enterprises where CSR is an integral part of the company's strategy (Mendibil et al. 2007).

CONCEPTUALIZATION OF COMPLEMENTARITY BETWEEN CSR AND INNOVATION

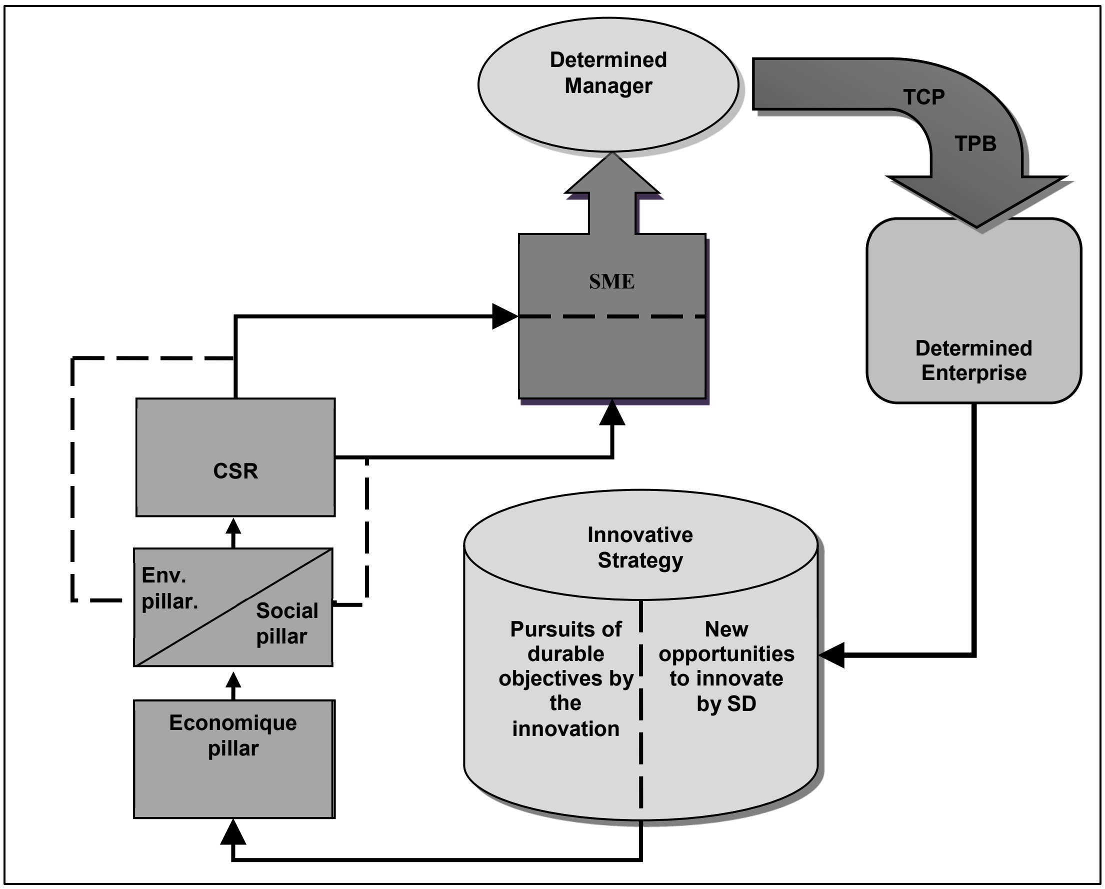
The literature review suggests there remains a lack of understanding about how CSR initiatives can be based on innovation processes by improving the performance of SMEs. The purpose of this contribution is to better understand the links that might exist between innovation and CSR practices in the context of SMEs and highlight the added value that can benefit business interaction.

On the basis of key determinants put forward in this approach and connections between them, we propose a hypothetical conceptual framework, represented in the form of a figure, which allows clearer understanding of the link between innovation and CSR. Figure 2 answers the question of complementarity: does innovation bring about CSR? Or on the contrary, is it societal commitment that leads toan innovation process? Do they become so innovative in order to achieve their goals of sustainability?

This rotary figure can be analysed according to two trajectories which differ by the nature of the SME concerned (innovative or not). Both of these two trajectories lead to integration of the three axes of profitability (Planet, Profit and People) on which CSR is based. They are distinguished, however, on the basis of their innovative strategy.

For the first trajectory, we take the starting-point of our process to be an ordinary (non-innovative) SME. At the head of this enterprise, there is the will of the manager. That is, a manager aware of sustainable developement issues and concerned about integrating the three poles of profitability to make the company aware of its responsibilities. This is due to pressure from some stakeholders (PS) on the manager and on the firm that the manager wants to engage in sustainability. These durable intentions (which are explained by our approach by the theory of planned behavior (TPB)) are manifested at the level of the determined enterprise. To pursue these sustainable goals, the SME implements innovative activities which may enable it to become more responsible. The innovation process is considered a necessary business tool to integrate CSR. Nevertheless, we consider a certain hierarchy in the integration of the three pillars of CSR. The SME, while meeting its requirements of profitability, will choose to invest in environmental and/or social actions. In familiarizing themselves with innovation activities, small businesses will also become innovative businesses. It is possible however that the entreprise may repeat this cycle several times to fully integrate the three pillars of sustainable development (SD) and really have an overall approach to CSR.

Figure 2: CSR and Innovation - Conceptual Figure of Their Complementarity



This figure represents a hypothetical conceptual framework of the complementarity between CSR and Innovation. It shows two trajectories leading to the integration of the three axes of profitability on which CSR is based. These two trajectories are distinguished on the basis of their innovative strategy.

The second trajectory considers initially an innovative SME, a firm which has already invested over a long period, in a continuous process of improvements and innovations. The innovative manager and his SME are also under pressure from stakeholders. The manager is committed then voluntarily (theory of planned behavior) in the way of sustainable development (SD). It is in this way the manager finds new opportunities for innovation that can bring added value to his enterprise and especially enable it to become a responsible SME. Integration of the three pillars of sustainable development respects the same hierarchy seen in the first trajectory and may also require several cycles of the process.

CONCLUSION

This exploratory approach investigates the issue of the CSR and the innovation in the particular context of the SMEs. The review of the literature allowed us to better specify the definition of SMEs. The paper then concentrates on the corporate social responsibility of enterprises. The literature suggests that corporate social responsibility corresponds to the balance of three pillars: economic, environmental and social. However, we think enterprise consideration of these three pillars could result in a hierarchical organization. We are also interested in the theory of planned behavior which we adapted to the CSR issue to explain the intention of the SME's manager to invest into the corporate social responsibility of his firm and the actions implemented to this end. Finally, we investigated the complementarity between CSR and innovation. This review of the literature allowed us to propose a rotary conceptual framework.

The hypothetical conceptual framework proposed shows that, regardless of the trajectory, there are SMEs which implement in a complementary way innovative activities and an approach to CSR with the aim of becoming socially responsible enterprises. However, this figure was intended to introduce a first reflection on their complementarity. Indeed, this contribution underlines key determinants involved at the CSR and innovation level in the context of SMEs.

Due to the exploratory character of the study, certain limits can be inevitably associated with our research. Nevertheless, we think that an exploratory study of this type allows generally understanding better a little studied issue while trying to promonte new avenues for future research. It would then be interesting to investigate in greater detail some aspects of this double issue which remain little explored, especially in the field of SMEs. Many questions still remain. A field study will therefore constitute the next step of this work. We hope it will enable us to further refine the conceptual framework proposed. In addition, the proposal of a rotary integrator figure involves a certain partial character, because the demarcation of the object of research is necessarily limited to the chosen subjects. Other subjects could also be integrated into the analysis.

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BIOGRAPHY

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