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Le « Business Case » de la RSE peut- il être source de performance économique pour la PME ?

Can "the Business Case of CSR" be a source of economic performance for the SME?

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Abstract

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), reserved for a long time to large companies, is now a strategic issue for all sizes organizations, including SMEs. The business case provides a complementary set of arguments that convince managers that the firm's interest converges with that of the society and that they do not depart from the expectations of the shareholders. The purpose of this paper is to provide a general overview of the debates on the Business Case as a strategy for the adoption of the CSR by the SME and to present the academic controversies that try to demonstrate that adopting a CSR policy is a profitable strategy and can be considered a source of economic performance.

Keywords: Business Case, Corporate Social Responsibility, Social performance, SMEs

Résumé :

La responsabilité sociale des entreprises (RSE), longtemps réservée aux grandes entreprises, est désormais un enjeu stratégique pour les organisations de toutes tailles, y compris les PME. Le Business case fournit un ensemble d'arguments qui se complètent et qui se renforcent pour convaincre les dirigeants que l'intérêt de la firme converge avec celui de la société et qu'ils ne s'écartent pas de ce qu'attendent les actionnaires. Le but du présent article est de fournir un panorama général des débats relatifs au ***« Business case*** » comme stratégie d'adoption de la RSE par la PME et de présenter les controverses académiques qui tentent à démontrer qu'adopter une politique RSE est une stratégie rentable et peut être considérée comme source de performance économique.

Mots clés : Business Case, Responsabilité sociale des entreprises, Performance sociale PME

Introduction:

In recent years, the issue of Corporate Social Responsibility has become a central issue in the life of companies and has led to a large number of publications in the social sciences. Companies can be pushed to engage in CSR, both for ethical or normative reasons about the role they must play in society, and for defensive reasons to regain their legitimacy they have lost. Other reasons may also be mentioned: a company may also choose to engage in a CSR approach because it is directly or indirectly in the short, medium or long term, profitable or even a source of economic performance; this is what many authors call a "Business Case of CSR". This notion, conceptualized and diffused since 1997 by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBSCSD)[1] and become the essential base of the managerial vision of the relations company-society.

The CSR business case "*refers to the underlying or rational arguments supporting or demonstrating why the business community should accept and support the cause of CSR. It answers the key question: What can CSR organizations remove? That is, how do they tangibly benefit from their engagement in CSR policies, activities or practices*?" (Carroll & Shabana, 2010, p85). The CSR business case therefore seeks to answer the following question: Can companies have a better financial performance by achieving both their core business and being responsible to society as a whole? (Kurucz & al, 2008). It therefore refers to arguments that rationally justify that there is a direct impact of a company's CSR policy on its economic or financial performance; companies that engage in CSR will then be economically rewarded by the market (Carroll & Shabana, 2010).

CSR is evolving into a core business function, central to the firm's overall strategy and vital to its success. Specifically, the Business Case of CSR addresses the question: "can small and medium companies perform better financially by addressing both their core business operations as well as their responsibilities to the broader society?"

This justification is widely used by those who want to encourage and put pressure on SMEs to integrate the dimensions of CSR into their management. But improving financial performance or profit would not be a sustainable premise easily.

It may be that the question of the existence or non-existence of a relationship between profitability and CSR is never resolved. This finding did not detract nearly fifty years after the

[1] The World Business Council for Sustainable Development brings together some 190 of the world's largest multinationals. In business and political circles, it played a key role in institutionalizing the user-vision of corporate-social relations.

emergence of CSR and more than thirty years after the first studies on the link between social responsibility and profitability (Moskowitz 1972, Bragdon and Marlin 1972).

A lot of research, both industrial and academic, has focused on the link between ethics and economics, and it seems that the question of cause and effect between economic performance and social performance has not yet been decided. This article is part of this current research on the business case of CSR. The objective is therefore to present the studies that are part of this trend in order to position ourselves within this set of works. We present two main lines of research that punctuate this functionalist trend of work on the business case of CSR: a first current, older, which seeks to highlight the direct relationship between the societal performance of the company (PSE) and financial performance (PF). We will show the limits of this first current on the basis of which a second stream of research, more recent and still little exploited from an academic point of view, can be developed.

This article first presents a literature review on the business case, and then reviews the arguments put forward by the model to encourage companies to adhere to responsible practices that are sources of financial performance. In the second place, the article focuses on studying the relationship between social performance (PSE) and the financial performance (PF) of the company. Through the analysis of the research carried out on the subject, we will show that, taken independently of each other, these different studies seem to show varying conclusions concerning the nature of the link between the PES and FP. We will see the reasons that can explain such variations between the conclusions of this work, to finally address the case of the Meta-analyzes which showed that in the end, when we cumulate all this research, the relation between the SP and FP appears to be positive.

1 . The Business Case for CSR: Literature review

1.1 Definition

"*The business case refers to the change of the company's policy in order to integrate the aims of CSR while having for primary objective the profitability of the firm*" (Dyllick and Hockerts 2002, Holliday et al.). Carroll, one of the leading figures in CSR research in SMEs, defines the business case: "*For most, the business case refers to the bottom-line*[2] *of reasons for*

[2] The Triple Bottom Line (TBL) or Triple Bilan refers to the Bottom line (literally, the bottom line of a profit and loss account) which allows investors, at a glance, to know if the company wins or not money. The Triple Bottom Line is a notion that takes into account not only the financial result, but also the social and environmental record of the company. Thus, thanks to the Triple Balance Sheet, it is possible to draw up a balance sheet showing the profits or losses generated by the company's social, environmental and economic activities.

businesses pursuing Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategies and policies, it is the business justification and rational; that is the specific benefits to businesses in an economic and financial (bottom-line) sense that would CSR activities and initiatives". (Carroll, 2010, p 95).

1.2 Business Case Characterization for CSR

The CSR business case is widely accepted by business stakeholders: According to a 2002 study by PricewaterhouseCoopers, "70% of general managers believe that CSR is vital to the profitability of their business" (Simms, 2002 in Vogel, 2005). Another study reports that 91% of CEOs believe that CSR management creates value for shareholders (Friedman S, 2003, in Vogel, 2005). The popularity of "cause related marketing" is another illustration of the link between CSR and the financial benefits that can be derived from it, with the main measure of this relationship being the increase in sales by companies setting up such actions.

It is then a matter of promising consumers who choose to buy this product, that a portion of the proceeds from the sales of this product will be donated to a cause (ex construction of schools or wells in developing countries).). The "cause related marketing" has thus grown in size: from $ 125 million in 1990, it rose to about $ 828 million in 2002, to $ 991 million in 2004 (Porter & Kramer, 1996, in Vogel, 2005).

The CSR business case is also widespread in academic books: Sandra Waddock's "*Companies with a conscience*" describes twelve companies whose experiences show that "*taking care of capitalism ... is not only decent but also profitable*" (In Vogel, 2005). Stuard Hart (in Vogel, 2005) also concludes that "*the responsibility for securing a sustainable world is largely on the shoulders of global companies" and "that in the end, it makes sense, from a point of view business, to pursue strategies for a sustainable world*."

The CSR business case has also been taken up by institutional bodies such as the European Union, which has repeatedly insisted on the benefits of CSR for the corporate business (ex: European Commission, 2004). This topic of the CSR business case will notably influence the drafting of the CSR Green Paper drafted by the European Union, and will be the central subject of numerous conferences organized by the EU and its members, in which the advantages of CSR are highlighted for both companies and investors.

Secondly, this angle of the business case has also influenced the world of education by changing the place of ethics or CSR in the teaching programs of business and management schools: CSR is then integrated into the classical disciplines, whereas it was previously taught separately from the latter.

Finally, this topic has also had an influence on the strategies of NGOs, some of which have chosen to cooperate with medium and small companies to help them reconcile their economic and social or environmental objectives. This is the "Doing well by doing good" (Kurucz, Colbert and Wheeler, 2008) often invoked to convince the adoption of CSR practice by companies.

After demonstrating that the CSR business case is increasingly shared and advanced by different categories of actors (academic, educational, economic, institutional, non-governmental), we will then list the main arguments advanced by these actors to demonstrate how a CSR strategy can influence the economic performance of the company.

1.3 Business Case Arguments for CSR

Kurucz & al (2008, p85-92), B. Carroll and M. Shabana (2011) identify four categories of benefits that companies can derive from their commitment to CSR.

1.3.1 Cost and risk reduction

This approach is also called "***eco efficiency***", meaning that a company, by decreasing or optimizing the use of resources to create its products, and by reducing waste, will achieve systematic savings. In the same way, for a service company, for example, reducing the amount of paper used, or energy, or offer video or web conferencing solutions to its employees will prevent business trips to its employees giving rise to a reduction in emissions due to their displacements, and a saving for the company in terms of costs and travel time. Initial investments are therefore necessary to implement these cost reduction initiatives, but their return on investment time is easily quantifiable by the company. Research shows that proactive engagement in environmental protection improves business outcomes and reduces risk « *being proactive on environmental issues can lower the costs of complying with present and future environmental regulations ... [and] ... enhance firm efficiencies and drive down operating costs*[3] ».

In addition, taking into account the environment in the management of the company makes it possible to better know the social and natural environment and thus to be able to anticipate the

[3] D.J. Vogel, Is there a market for virtue? "**The business case for corporate social responsibility**." *California Management Review*, 47, 2005, pp. 19–45.

possible risks due to the consequences of the activity of the company. The argument is also supported by the academic world who argues that proactive behavior of the company (anticipation, planning) is preferable, because easier to implement and less expensive than a reactive behavior which consists in reacting only to social or societal problems as they arise (Carroll & Buchholtz, 2009).

The reduction of costs and risks linked to the adoption of a CSR policy is a point widely accepted by managers and managers. In a survey conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers[4] among managers, 73% of respondents indicated that "cost savings" was one of the top three reasons their companies committed to CSR policies.

1.3.2 Obtaining a competitive advantage

The term competitive advantage is better understood when we talk about business strategies and specifically differentiation strategies. In the same vein, the focus is on how companies can use CSR practices to differentiate themselves from their competitors. In line with what was mentioned in the previous paragraph, it can be said that protecting against risks and reducing production costs is the first competitive advantage that a CSR policy provides and that the company can exploit to outpace its competitors. Similarly, having the best human resource skills, motivating and retaining them through an equitable human resources policy can, on its own, be a key success factor for a company.

CSR initiatives also have a positive impact on the attraction of investments. Many institutional investors "avoid companies or industries that violate their organizational missions, values or principles .... And they are looking for companies with good references on employee relations, environmental management, and relationship with the community.... "[5]

Engaging in CSR policies can also be a source of innovation and anticipation. Thus association and dialogue with stakeholders (including customers, civil society, NGOs ....) will allow the company to detect latent needs or expectations and also to evolve products and services in the direction expected by consumers and by civil society. Similarly, each

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4 *Top 10 Reasons*, PricewaterhouseCoopers 2002 Sustainability Survey Report, reported in "Corporate America's Social Conscience," *Fortune*, May 26, 2003, 58.

5 D.J. Vogel, "Is there a market for virtue? The business case for corporate social responsibility." California Management Review, 47, 2005, pp. 19–45 constraint imposed by the CSR approach allows the company to innovate, anticipate and propose new solutions adapted to the expectations of customers and civil society, resulting in a significant competitive advantage for the company.

For David Vogel (2005) a more responsible company can develop a competitive advantage over its competitors because: "*It will be better able to protect itself from consumer boycotts, to obtain capital at a lower price, to be in a better position to attract and retain committed employees and loyal customers. Both responsible and sophisticated investors will consider their investments in less responsible companies to be too risky. The value of the brand and the sales of the non-responsible companies will decline because of their media exposure, public protests, and boycotts. And the morale of their employees will suffer*" (Vogel, 2005, p16-17).

1.3.3 Reputation and legitimacy development

Companies can also justify their CSR commitments on the basis of creating, defending and maintaining their legitimacy and reputation. A company is perceived as legitimate when its activities are in harmony with the objectives and values of the company in which the company operates. In other words, a company is perceived as legitimate when it fulfills its social responsibility.

A CSR policy therefore improves the position of a company to be considered legitimate in the eyes of stakeholders. Again in a study of the Boston CSR Center, consumers, investors and employees have shown a clear preference for companies that take their social responsibility seriously. The same research[6] shows that 66% of the managers interviewed thought that their responsible policies resulted in the improvement of their companies' reputation as well as their profits.

Communication about a company's CSR actions can also be a factor in developing reputation and legitimacy. A company that communicates about its CSR actions and shares its actions with its stakeholders can then benefit from a positive image from civil society .This social reporting practice was encouraged by the launch of the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI)[7] in

[6] "Managing Corporate Citizenship as a Business Strategy," Boston: Center for Corporate Citizenship, 2010.

[7] The Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) was established in late 1997 with the mission of developing globally applicable guidelines for sustainable development, as well as reporting on economic, environmental and social performance, initially for companies and then subsequently, for any governmental or non-governmental organization. Convened by the Environmentally Responsible Economies Coalition (CERES) in association with the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), the GRI incorporates the active participation of corporations, NGOs, accounting organizations, human rights associations, and NGOs. business, and other stakeholders around

1997 and the introduction of the United Nations Global Compact in 1999. Through these social relationships, companies can document that their activities are consistent with social norms and expectations and therefore are perceived as legitimate.

1.3.4 Seeking for Win-Win Results by Creating Value Based on Synergy

Value creation arguments based on synergy focus on exploiting opportunities that reconcile the different requirements of stakeholders. Companies can do this by linking the interests of stakeholders and by giving a pluralistic dimension to the value created. In other words with a sufficiently big cause, the company can unite several interest groups under the same cause. The idea of a win-win situation that can emerge following the adoption of a CSR policy has been raised by several authors, management expert Peter Drucker argues that "*The true sense of a company's social responsibility is its ability to turn a social problem into an economic opportunity, productive capacity, human skills and wealth*"[8]

Before presenting the different currents and results of academic research or studies that have focused on this business case of CSR, we could legitimately first wonder about the reasons that could lead to the construction of a so many important works on this theme. One of the most fundamental explanations lies in the fact that highlighting a "positive" statistical relationship between societal performance and financial performance would resolve the endless controversy between CSR proponents and its radical opponents (Gond, 2006). Indeed, Vogel (2005, p 24) quotes Margolis & Walsh (2001b, p4-5) who observe that: "*The empirical evidence of a positive causal relationship that transforms social performance into financial performance also promises, for some, a solution to closing the debate on the social role and responsibilities of companies ... Those who defend an economic role of companies will find a financial rationality behind CSR practices, and those who defend a broader conception of the company's responsibilities will not need to resort to an alternative construction of the company's goals to justify its extended responsibilities* "

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the world. The current GRI version (since 2013) is called G4. It is expected to gradually replace the G3 and G3.1 guidelines.

[8] Peter F. Drucker, "The New Meaning of Corporate Social Responsibility." California Management Review, 1984, 26: 53-63

2 The Business Case: Studies of direct relations SPE-FP

In this section, we propose to present the first current research on the CSR business case concerning the study of the direct link between the social performance (SPE) and the financial performance (FP) of the company. This current of research has been very widely invested, with at least 120 studies dealing with this link, the first having been published in 1972 (Vogel, 2005, p23). We will first show that, independently of each other, these different studies seem to show varying conclusions about the nature of the link between PES and FP. We will then see the reasons that may explain such variations between the conclusions of this research, to finally address the case of meta-analyzes that showed that in the end, when we combine all this research, the relationship between the SPE and FP appears to be positive, albeit moderate, with no indication of which factors to attribute this overall positive contribution to financial performance. To write this part, we have also partially relied on the work of Gond (2006), which we have completed with the subsequent work on this topic and with the Vogel approach (2005).

2.1 Variable conclusions between researches

For more than thirty years, work has followed one another to analyze the financial impact of societal performance or corporate social responsibility, without any stable conclusion, based theoretically and unambiguously does not really emerge from the body of research gradually accumulated (Allouche & Laroche, 2005, Gond, 2001, Margolis & Walsh, 2001a, 2003, Rowley & Berman, 2000), thus generating controversies of theoretical, statistical or empirical nature.

Indeed, many studies have studied the direct link between societal performance and financial performance, but their results are controversial. While some studies show a negative relationship between these concepts (ex Vance, 1975), others show a positive relationship (ex Abbott and Monsen, 1979, Bragdon and Marlin, 1972, Graves and Waddock, 1994, Spencer and Taylor, 1987, Sadik and Riggar, 2018) and others finally show no significant relationship (ex, Aupperle et al, 1985, Davidson and Worrell, 1990, McGuire et al, 1988). Similarly, Vogel (2005) demonstrates in his book this ambivalence in the results of studies on the SPE-PF link: For example, in the environmental field, one study shows a moderate positive relationship between emission reduction levels between 1988 and 1989 and the financial performance of firms (Hart & Ahuja, 1996). Another study shows a strong positive relationship between financial performance and adherence to global environmental standards

(Dowell, Hart & Yeung, 1999). A third study shows a positive relationship between financial performance and several dimensions of environmental performance based on ratings by the Franklin Research and Development Corporation.

But some studies draw different conclusions: For example, McWilliams and Siegel (2000, p608), in reviewing the findings of a study proving a strong positive link between societal and financial performance (Waddock & Graves, 1997), showed that "*When the intensity of research and development is included in the equation, the societal performance of the company has a neutral effect on profitability*", while companies that actively engage in CSR also tend to achieve strategic investments in R & D.

Vogel (2005) also refers to the dozens of literature reviews published between 1979 and 1999 that agree that the relationship between SPE and FP has not been established and that neither researchers nor practitioners can rely on these research results because they are incomparable (Mahon & Griffen, 1997).

Finally, the field of the study of the performance of socially responsible funds (SRI) compared to that of the classic stock market indexes meets the same controversies: Thus, the works of Luther, Matako and Corner (1992, 1994 in Dejean F, 2004) show that socially responsible funds outperform conventional funds, while Mallin, Saadouni and Briston (1995, in Déjean, 2004) come to the opposite conclusion. Finally, Diltz (1995, in Déjean, 2004) demonstrates that the performances are identical. Again, this heterogeneity should be qualified given the significant variability between the methodologies used, and because of the current lack of progress against these SRI funds; indeed, the impact of non-financial dimensions on the total performance of a fund can only really be expressed in the long term (Cummings, 2000, in Déjean, 2004).

2.2 Reasons explaining the variability of these conclusions:

We might question about the reasons that might explain the variability of these conclusions; they seem of two kinds: Theoretical first, with questioning about theoretical models used that who postulates the existence of a direct relationship between SPE and FP (Schuler & Cording, 2006). Empiric then, with suspicions about the quality of the samples used to measure this link (Griffin & Mahon, 1997), or agin the quality and representativeness of the SPE measures mobilized in relation to the theoretical dimensions of the concept (Griffin & Mahon, 1997, Waddock & Graves, 1997), or finally on the quality of the methodologies used (Margolis &

Walsh, 2001). Thus all this empirical research is not without serious methodological limitations (Allouche & Laroche 2005, Gond 2001, Margolis & Walsh 2003) exposed by Gond (2006), which we propose to quickly recall:

2.2.1 Problems related to the SPE's measurement

The dynamics of this field seem to have been created from the data available to researchers, according to the approach that Ullmann (1985) describes as "***data in search of theories***". From the point of view of the interactions between SPE and FP, this diversity directly affects the results obtained, the nature of the interactions between SPE and PF strongly varying according to the measures adopted (Allouche & Laroche, 2005a). Finally, the qualitative nature of the SPE measurement criteria seems to make it difficult to evaluate (Agle and Kelley 2001, Mitnick 2000, Rowley and Berman 2000).

2.2.2 Problems related to the disparity of FP measures:

Empirical studies generally use two or three measures of financial performance, while Griffin and Mahon identify more than 80 different measures mobilized in the 67 studies they analyzed. Again, the results of the studies on the SPE-PF links vary greatly depending on the measurement methods of the selected financial performance. This factor, combined with the diversity of SPE measures, thus weakens the prospects of generalizing the results obtained.

2.2.3 Problems related to research designs and methodologies:

The authors who analyzed this corpus also highlighted certain shortcomings related to the methodologies and / or research designs used to carry out these studies (ex neglect of control variables, bias in the selection of the companies studied). Concerning the control variables, Vogel (2005) notes that some studies do not use any control variables, meaning that any relation found can be misleading because it may be due to causes other than that of the explanatory variable "PES". Other studies use different control variables: In all, almost 50 different control variables were used, such as enterprise size or risk, frequently used, but most are used only once. This fact further increases the difficulty in identifying the true contribution of PES to FP (Vogel, 2005).

2.3 Meta-analysis that conclude a moderate positive relationship between SPE and FP:

However, in order to determine more precisely the nature of the link between PSE and FP, numerous meta-analyzes have been conducted recently (Allouche & Laroche, 2005a and 2005b, Arlow & Gannon, 1982, Gond, 2001, Griffin & Mahon Margolis & Walsh, 2001a, 2001b and 2003, Pava & Krausz, 1996, Orlitzky et al., 2003, Roman et al., 1999 and Ullmann, 1985). These make it possible to evaluate more precisely the nature of the correlation between SPE and FP. These techniques make it possible to consider all the populations of companies evaluated in all the studies and to infer, from the correlations observed in each case, much more significant and general results (Orlitzky et al, 2003). These meta-analyzes make it possible to classify studies according to the nature of the relationship highlighted (positive, negative, insignificant, mitigated).

For example, Margolis & Walsh (2003) present a review and evaluation of the 127 empirical studies that explored the link between CSR and financial performance in which they conclude that "*a simple compilation of results suggests that there is positive association, and certainly very little evidence of negative associations, between a company's social performance and its financial performance* "(Margolis & Walsh, 2003, p277).

Then, the meta-analysis carried out by Orlitzky et al (2003), puts forward a positive relationship between CSR and FP They have implemented a complex methodology to differentiate studies according to the quality of their methodology used (to avoid contamination of studies showing measurement or sampling errors, for example). For these authors "there is a positive association between SPE and FP within industrial contexts, and within different contexts of study" (Orlitzky & al, 2003, p423). In addition, they add that a "*universally positive*" relationship is variable (between highly positive and modestly positive) because of contingencies such as the effects of reputation, FP measures, or SPE disclosures. In the end, a major recent study (2008) conducted by the Economic Intelligence Unit (EIU)[9] suggests that a large majority of business leaders now accept that there is a clear correlation between societal performance and financial performance. The study shows that managerial support for CSR initiatives extends to the management level as well (Business Green, 2008).

Margolis et al (2007) have also recently proposed a meta-analysis based on 192 results from 167 studies on the PSE-FP link which also concludes that there is a positive relationship even if it is moderate. Their study does not take into account, like that of Orlitzky et al (2003)

[9] The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) is a British business within the Economist Group providing forecasting and advisory services through research and analysis, such as monthly country reports, five-year country economic forecasts, country risk service reports, and industry reports. The EIU provides country, industry, and management analysis worldwide and incorporates the former Business International Corporation, a UK company acquired by its parent company in 1986. The EIU has several offices across the globe including two offices in China and one in Hong Kong

possible contaminations, and considers all studies to be of equivalent quality, which may explain why they discover a more modest positive relationship than Orlitzky's. al (Wood, 2010). They conclude that "*after 35 years of research, the majority of evidence indicates a positive average relationship between SPE and FP*".

The clear signal that emerges from all of this work is that the number of studies showing a positive result is generally higher than the number of studies presenting one of the other two relationships (see Margolis & Walsh, 2001b). , 2003) Overall, research on the relationship between SPE and FP suggests that there is a moderate positive relationship between SPE and FP (Carroll & Shabana, 2010); however, some inconsistencies persist, which can be attributed both to methodological differences and interpretive biases, but also to the existence of mediating variables and situational contingencies that influence the relationship between SPE and FP (Carroll & Shabana, 2010). Indeed, when one observes the figures, at a global level, the correlations observed between SPE and FP are relatively important (of the order of 16%), despite a strong heterogeneity of results (see Allouche and Laroche, 2005): the correlations observed only capture, according to the studies, between 20 and 24% of the variance depending on the work. This means that about 80% of the variance in the studies remains attributable to factors such as mediating and moderating variables that are not taken into account by the meta-analysis. At this stage it may be possible to conclude that the relationship between SPE and PF is moderate but positive, without knowing exactly which factors to attribute this interaction.

The "black box" of SPE-FP interactions (Gond, 2001) produces a positive relationship, but is still opaque: almost all of the mediators and moderators who realize it are still unclear (Gond, 2006). Thus, for Carroll & Shabana (2010), future research that takes into account these mediating and contingency factors will improve understanding of the link between SPE and FP and help to find conclusive results regarding the CSR business case, and to give understanding keys to organizations so that they can identify the SPE levers for action to achieve better final economic performance.

This new field of research on the business case of the CSR seems to be able to be source of theoretical contributions (progression of the research on the business case) as managerial (identification of the levers of action for the organizations). We propose to study it from another angle in the following paragraph.

3 Treat the Business Case differently

On the basis of the concluding elements of the previous paragraph, we will present in this one the second possible research stream concerning the study of the CSR business case. This is based on the empirical and theoretical weaknesses of the previous trend. This second stream of research is more recent, and still includes few works; however, many authors argue that it represents a real opportunity to advance the study of the CSR business case (Carroll & Shabana, 2010, Gond, 2006, Gond & Igalens, 2008, Wood, 2010). We propose to describe it in a first place, and then justify the positioning of our article in this new field of investigation.

Berger & al (2007) examine the practical integration of CSR within companies. They distinguish three models of integration of CSR:

- The "***social value***" model: In this model, companies adopt CSR initiatives for non-economic, irrational reasons, CSR being integrated at the heart of all dimensions of the company.
- The "***business case***" model: Companies adopt CSR initiatives for rational reasons, in this case with purely economic objectives. The choice of initiatives depends on the existence of a clear and direct link to financial performance.
- The "***syncretic stewardship***" model: Similarly, in this model, CSR initiatives are carried out for rational reasons, with a pursuit of economic objectives but while integrated into a "management philosophy" by combining virtue "and economic objectives (Berger & al, 2007, p144).

For Berger & al (2007) the last two models integrate a pursuit of economic objectives and can thus be assimilated to two different visions of the CSR business case (BC): a narrow view ("business case" model) and a broad view ("syncretic stewardship" model) of the BC of CSR. In the first model, BC is described by Berger & al (2007) as "narrow" because CSR is only sought when there is a clear link to the financial performance of the firm. In the second model, BC's vision is described as "broad" because it looks for direct and indirect relationships between CSR and company performance, thus making it possible to appreciate the complex relationship between CSR and the company's performance, recognizing the interdependence that binds the company and society (Berger & al, 2007).

Thus, a narrow view of BC CSR seeks to justify a direct link between CSR and financial performance, and focuses on identifying the immediate cost reductions generated by the CSR approach. On the contrary, BC's broad view focuses on the fact that CSR initiatives can have direct and indirect impacts on financial performance, thus enabling the company to benefit from all the opportunities generated by the CSR approach. She argues that CSR can enable the company to build a competitive advantage by creating a win-win relationship with its stakeholders, while realizing gains in cost and risk reduction, and improving reputation and legitimacy to the company (Kurucz et al, 2008). The broad vision of BC described by Berger & al (2007) therefore recognizes the complex and interdependent nature of the relationship between PES and FP, and thus deepens the understanding of CSB CS.

If the "narrow" vision of the BC is similar to the first research on the direct link PSE-PF described above and whose limits we have shown, the "broad" vision of the BC seems, on the contrary, to be integrated into the new field of BC research mentioned at the end of the previous paragraph. Indeed, recognizing this complexity and looking for direct and indirect links to financial performance, allows us to better understand the impact of CSR activities on the financial performance of the company by taking into account the effects of mediating variables and situational contingencies. The inconsistencies in the results of studies on the direct link between SPE and FP may then be justified: the benefits of CSR are not homogeneous and depend on the ability of the company to develop appropriate CSR strategies (Smith N, 2003: Smith T, 2005) which are directed towards parallel improvement of stakeholders and social welfare relationships (Barnett, 2007). Good CSR strategies are those that demonstrate convergence between economic and social objectives (Porter & Kramer, 2006), including the mediating and contingent variables involved in the interactions between the company and its stakeholders.

Pivato & al (2008) illustrate, for example, the role of trust as a mediating variable that links CSR activities to financial performance. They argue that attention must be focused on "intermediate measures of performance, such as customer satisfaction ... to prove the existence of positive correlations with social investments" (Pivato & al, 2008, p3). Their empirical study illustrates that CSR initiatives by the company indirectly influence its performance by acting on the building of relationships of trust with customers, which results in greater brand loyalty. The study thus indicates that CSR initiatives can have an indirect positive influence on the financial performance of the company, trust being in this case the mediating variable that links SPE to FP.

A contingent perspective as presented by Pivato et al (2008) thus allows the development of justifications concerning the lack of positive relations between CSR and FP in certain circumstances. In addition, it provides an argument for defending CSB in environments where BC has not worked (ex De Schutter 2008, Valor 2008, Williamson & al 2006). Mediating variables and situational contingencies influence the impacts of CSR on FP, explaining that the impacts of SPE are not always positive on FP. Identifying the role of mediating variables and situational contingencies thus improves understanding of the relationship between performance and accountability (Carroll & Shabana, 2010). Companies are, therefore, able to identify and pursue profitable CSR initiatives and to establish a stronger relationship between their CSR strategy and approach, as suggested by Porter & Kramer (2006).

These different conclusions concerning the need to open the "black box" of interactions between SPE and FP (Gond, 2001), or the discovery of mediating and contingent variables at play in SPE-FP interactions, lead us to join these different authors to explore this new field of research on the business case of CSR. Thus, new lines of research can be opened concerning the dynamics of interaction between the concepts, for example through models distinguishing between internal mechanisms of building skills and learning abilities through SPE or external strengthening of financial performance by reputation influenced by the SPE (Orltizky et al, 2003), but whose intermediate variables and moderators remain largely to be explored (Gond, 2006). The goal here would be to understand how and why a policy of accountability would be beneficial, and therefore what mechanisms are going from SPE to FP. Indeed, the search for a relationship between CSR and financial performance, can not be simple, direct and unconditional, because all companies do not practice CSR in the same way, with the same sincerity and the same commitment (Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006).

Conclusion

In 1974 Votaw declared, already, "*The movement of corporate social responsibility would need to fall back on earth*" because according to the author, "*no social cause in recent history has been subject to so many different approaches, definitions, revisions, conceptions and dogmas as much as this one* "(p102-103). More than thirty years later, the theme of CSR seems to provoke more controversy and debate without reaching consensus on the issues surrounding it. The purpose of this paper was to provide an overview of these debates by showing the diversity of positions and opinions regarding the CSR Business Case.

To conclude on the subject matter of our article, we can advance the idea that the only certainty that we can have on this subject is that investment in CSR does not systematically generate an immediate return on investment. This ambiguity leaves the door open to speculation as to the economic argumentation in favor of the "Business Case" of CSR

This article has two limitations, one referring to the content and the other to the method. At the content level, we cannot consider that we have been exhaustive with regard to the debates on the Business Case of CSR. The arguments developed both to prove the existence of a causal link between PSE and FP remains insufficient to decide on the question. The theoretical and practical part is so dense and evolving that it seems difficult to define as a whole; the existence of debates and controversies around the theme can be supported by mobilizing other perspectives and other authors. The second limitation of this paper lies in relying solely on a review of the literature without resorting to empirical investigation. An investigation into the perceptions of the Business Case as a model of CSR among SMEs could usefully complement this investigation.

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