10. MNEs, institutional environment, corporate social responsibility and sustainable development
Proposed as Interactive Paper

Can crisis management help companies reinforce CSR strategies? Crossing chasms and stakeholders

Abstract

This paper discusses the influence of crisis over corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies within multinational enterprises (MNE), most specifically in what concerns the impact of crisis management and the role of stakeholders on reinforcing socially responsible strategies. In order to approach such question, the change process within the French oil company Total is illustrated through the case study about the oil spill caused by the tanker Erika and the management of this crisis. By integrating stakeholders' demands in such context, it was possible to observe that Total has reinforced its CSR strategy moving from a reactive posture to a more proactive one through a back and forth strategy between incremental and drastic changes. Also, through the analysis of a responsible management of crisis, this paper highlights a critical step, *the chasm*, which is based on the concept presented by Rogers (1983) and Moore (2002) concerning the role of agents of change to diffuse new ideas and that may assure that CSR practices are well-accepted, shared and planned within companies. By crossing the chasm, companies move from a *close-culture* which consists on individually proposing ideas without taking into account stakeholders' demands to an *open-culture*, based on a collective resolution of problems among stakeholders.

Key-words: crisis management, corporate social responsibility, stakeholders, change process, chasm, oil business.

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INTRODUCTION

In the last decades, corporate social responsibility (CSR) has been promoted by international institutions and has been widely discussed by researchers under several perspectives (e.g. Clarkson, 1995; Hollingworth & Valentine, 2015). Its scope is seen as very broad, going from social to environmental responsibilities. Deresky (2008, p. 34), for example, argues that *"CSR's areas of interest are poverty, lack of opportunities in the world, environment, consumption, safety and employees' welfare".* Under such perspective, responsibilities of organizations, such as multinational companies (MNC), seem deeply critical due to the impact that their search for performance may have over their stakeholders. For that reason, CSR has been at the centre of multiple interests involving several different actors in multinational environments.

Strategizing CSR implies then a focus on stakeholders, their influence and their behavior. Many works have been interested on such relations and the theoretical aspects of it like, for example, the concept of power and the resource dependence theory (Frooman, 1999). However, few papers were interested on the change process developed when stakeholders interact within an environment of crisis. Therefore, this paper focuses on whether "crisis management can help companies reinforce CSR strategies", more specifically *what* actors do in practice and *how* they accomplish it. Those actors are a range of individuals similar to the agents of change which have been defined by Rogers (1983) and Moore (2002): they diffuse new ideas and they may assure the acceptance of CSR practices. In order to do that, literature about crisis management, corporate social responsibility and change is mobilized to better understand the strategic links between stakeholders' cognition, emotions and behaviors

(Weick, 1995, Balogun, 2003) in the context of this research. For that reason, theoretical backgrounds on change and crisis are combined in order to critically analyze CSR through the creation of a model based on the works of Autissier & Vandangeon-Derumez (2005), Carroll (1979), Rogers (1983), Robert & Verpeaux (1991), Roux-Dufort (2003), Martinet & Payaud (2008) and Johnson et al. (2011). The objectives are to better comprehend the interaction of stakeholders with the agents of change within the process of critical events, as well as to highlight a critical step within crisis - *the chasm* (Rogers, 1983) - which assures the passage to accepted, shared and planned CSR practices within companies. By considering the change process and how crisis are managed with stakeholders, this model helps to analyze stakeholders' influence on the adoption of certain socially responsible strategies by organizations. It may also give sense to conduct change in their daily actions. When considering the different phases of responsible crisis management through the lights of the literature about change, *the chasm* (Rogers, 1983) corresponds to the gap between two different groups of stakeholders: one constituted by individuals who are convinced of the benefits of CSR to manage crises, and the other formed by pragmatic individuals who demand references to be clearly established before definitely adopting new practices. When the organization and its managers enter the second group, CSR strategies become more proactive than in the first one, since the impact of stakeholders on change is maximal. Literature has therefore been interested in defining *the chasm* and in what happens *before* and *after* it (Rogers, 1983) and, in this paper, we are interested in better understanding what happens *within the chasm*. In order to illustrate such theoretical framework, this paper analyzes the case of Total and the oil tanker Erika, most precisely the accident and the major oil spill involving the latter some years ago, causing great damages to the French coast and menacing the company's reputation. By doing so, we were able to observe that by crossing the chasm, companies move from a *close-culture* which consists on individually proposing ideas without

taking into account stakeholders' demands to an *open-culture*, based on a collective resolution of problems among stakeholders. The following sections describe the main aspects of this research, such as its theoretical framework, its methodology and field of research as well as its main findings and some elements for discussion and conclusions made so far by this research which is currently presented in its early stage.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

CRISIS AND THE ROLE OF STAKEHOLDERS

Crisis often describes critical and exceptional circumstances menacing previously known and established frameworks: in the organizational context, Hermann (1963) defines it as an unexpected or unanticipated event that threatens the most important values of the organization and requires a rapid response in a short period of time. Moreover, no matter on which level crisis happens (international, local, organizational), it often expresses a certain inability of stakeholders to understand or manage such situations, even though it can be seen as something that is part of a process, a chaotic environment where actions and individuals interact (Thiétart & Forgues, 1997) and that evolves through different phases (Robert & Verpeaux, 1991; Roux-Dufort, 2003).

Stakeholders have a central role in critical events, since they undergo the effects from it and may have an important role on the development of controversial situations (Patriotta et al., 2011). In fact, crises can radically change these actors' level of importance from managers' point of view and, consequently, the priority given to their requests (Alpaslan et al., 2009). With the help of researchers, MNCs have developed several CSR options and configurations to reassure their stakeholders. In fact, those individuals or groups of individuals who can influence or be influenced by the achievement of the goals of the organization (Freeman, 1984) are the dominant framework of CSR theories. Carroll (1991), for example, has

mentioned four types of CSR. Companies should consider four main responsibilities: (1) economic responsibilities, through which companies are supposed to produce goods and services that consumers need while maximizing profits at the same time; (2) legal responsibilities, which ensure stakeholders that companies operate and get higher profits in accordance with the law; (3) ethical responsibilities, which state that non-statutory laws, rules of conduct and implicit values prevail as long as companies and stakeholders are concerned; and (4) philanthropic responsibilities, through which companies should provide financial and humanitarian contributions.

In practice, NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) have been important promoters of such responsibilities (Dunning & Lundan, 2008) and, most recently, the ISO 26000 (*International Organization for Standardization*) standard represents an even better example of how MNCs can put them into practice. Such standards mainly help regulating business-society relationships (Capron & Quairel-Lanoizelée, 2010) and establishing responsible strategic partnerships (Doh & Guay, 2004).

THE NOTION OF RESPONSIBILITY ON CSR: A STRATEGIC RESPONSE

Several criteria allow better understanding the commitment of MNCs towards CSR. Mazerolle (2008, p. 166), for example, identifies the *pressure put on companies* (by NGOs, the public opinion, the law and other regulations); and *the attitude of organizations themselves* (since they may have different perceptions of CSR, going from a constraint to an opportunity). From a similar point of view, Capron and Quairel-Lanoizelée (2010) suggest different strategic behaviors according to *"the economic interests of the company"* (risk or opportunity) and *"the focus of the management board"* (media exposure or stakeholders' pressure).

Thence, similar to their influence over crisis, stakeholders also have an important role in what concerns strategizing corporate social responsibility, since many MNCs develop CSR strategies in order to meet their expectations. Such notion, along with the different CSR strategies, has been formalized and applied within companies of different sizes, activities and cultural contexts (Smith, 2003). Some studies have shown gradual approaches to CSR, like Clarkson's (1995), who designed a performance scale according to specific CSR strategies (reactive, defensive, resigned and proactive). Martinet and Payaud (2008, p. 204) have also identified four CSR strategies: (1) the "cosmetic" CSR, whose practices are superficial and companies give a minimal response to legal requirements; (2) the "additional or peripheral" CSR, in which practices are not directly linked to the company's activities and competences ; (3) the "integrated" CSR, which is integrated to the company's monitoring chart (Kaplan and Norton, 2003); and (4) the "BoP" (*Bottom of the Pyramid*) CSR based on recommendations concerning very poor countries. In this case, socially responsible practices are vital to redesign the system of activities of a given community. The introduction of those strategies could provide significant benefits for companies, since they entail advantages that may subsequently be evaluated by MNCs in the context of crisis, such as performance, evaluation tools, human resources and business practices (Mazerolle, 2006). Even if such typologies are representative and help understand CSR within MNCs, the latter tend to implement responsible practices in several different ways, since a socially responsible approach depends on how organizations apprehend change (Autissier & Vandangeon-Derumez, 2005).

CSR, PROCESSES AND AGENTS OF CHANGE

Both crisis and CSR are synonyms to important periods of change (Zhao et al., 2014). The works of Lewin (1951) and Pettigrew (1985) are often mobilized as the main model to

approach change and it can be considered not only as something that can be decided, but that should be managed (e.g.: Autissier & Vandangeon-Derumez, 2005; Balogun, 2003).

Therefore, a responsible crisis management implies deep changes in the organization's culture and considers specific roles and behaviors while taking into account stakeholders' demands (Giannarakis & Sariannidis, 2012). Change was recently defined according to two perspectives: its nature, which can be incremental or drastic; and its magnitude, which can be reactive or proactive (Johnson et al., 2011). According to Autissier & Vandangeon-Derumez (2005), these two axes are the pace and the engine of change. The authors propose a typology for change: *adjustment*, *compulsory transformation*, *adaptation* and *planned transformation*, being particularly interested in the behaviors and in the role of management in each one of those types of changes. In the cases of *adjustment* and *planned transformation*, the impact of stakeholders on change is minimal: the priorities are defined inside the company by a leader who assures that employees do not divert from their initial mission (Burgelman, 1991). Here, the agents of change have a minor role to play because the decision is hierarchical and unilateral. In the case of *compulsory transformation* and *adaptation*, the impact of stakeholders on change is maximal, since priorities are defined collectively, which emphasizes the need to operationalize changes. Here, the agents of change have a major role, since there is more empathy because decisions are transversal and multilateral.

Based on the theoretical framework presented above, Table 1 below presents a model that highlights the interactions between crisis, changes and socially responsible practices in order to define a specific step, *the chasm*, where the agent of change have a role to play and which conducts individuals to deeply change their attitudes towards more responsible practices.

***** Table 1 about here *****

Table 1 above is an effort to illustrate the theoretical concepts mobilized by this paper and, most importantly, to highlight the existing connections between them. First, five phases of crisis are considered (preliminary, acute, critical, rebalancing, and analysis and change) (Robert & Verpeaux, 1991; Roux-Dufort, 2003). After that, change according to its nature (*incremental* or *radical*) and its scale (*realignment* or *transformation*) (Johnson et al., 2011) is also taken into consideration. Then, four forms of change appear: *adjustment*, *compulsory transformation*, *adaptation* and *planned transformation*. For each situation, the work of Autissier and Vandangeon-Derumez (2005) suggests that: (1) in case of *adjustment*, the role of management is to avoid incoherencies, (2) in case of *compulsory transformation*, its role is to question the implicit thinking, (3) in case of *adaptation*, there is a need to anticipate, and (4) in case of *planned transformation*, it is necessary to plan drastic changes. Under such perspective, and taking into account the work of Martinet and Payaud (2008), it is finally possible to consider that the "cosmetic strategy" refers to adjustment, the "additional or peripheral strategy" to compulsory transformation, the "integrated strategy" to adaptation and the "BoP" ("Bottom of the Pyramid") strategy to planned transformation. In terms of strategizing change, the logic is similar: cosmetic/ to avoid incoherencies, additional or peripheral/ to question the implicit thinking, integrated strategy/ to anticipate and BoP/ to plan drastic changes.

Although the successful implementation of CSR strategies does not necessarily depend on the commitment of all stakeholders (Rodrigo & Arenas, 2007), different behaviors may occur. As Alberola & Richez-Battesti (2005) argue, four main aspects of CSR may be precised: (1) CSR is based on a voluntary-behavior, (2) the role of actors and stakeholders have to be defined, (3) CSR should be considered as an investment to optimize, and (4) CSR is embedded in management, it is not an option. These four aspects lead companies to adapt some of their strategic procedures (Capron & Quairel-Lanoizelée, 2010) in different scales. The success of

CSR strategies seems to pass through the ability of companies to establish a dialogue with their stakeholders by using a cooperative approach based on common values, therefore building a daily culture of social responsibility (Seguin & Durif, 2007). This implies an ability to progress from a universe of meaning to another in order to create a common sense (Weick, 1995) and work together. Here, the agents of change may help to succeed this process (Rogers, 1983; Moore, 2002). This success also implies that companies which have a higher involvement to solve social and environmental problems also receive higher economic benefits. In order to approach such role, the change process within the French oil company Total is illustrated through the case study about the oil spill caused by the tanker Erika and the management of this crisis.

METHODOLOGY AND FIELD OF RESEARCH

DATA COLLECTION

This work is characterized by an empirical research based on a qualitative approach. The data collection has been conducted in two main ways: 1) a review of literature in order to find the theoretical basis mainly concerning the concepts of crisis, corporate social responsibility and change process; 2) the elaboration of a case study, which was carried out based on a) a documental and press articles collection through the Factiva database (Mayrhofer, 2002), which resulted in the collection of 3.755 articles; b) the reading and analysis of those articles, mainly from French and North-American media (covering the period crisis and post-crisis, i.e. from 1999 to 2012), which allowed to identify 488 texts specifically concerning the oil spill caused by the oil tanker Erika and its consequences as well as thirteen socially responsible actions directly connected to the event of Erika and that were put into practice by Total following the accident; as well as six semi-directive interviews following a guide (Bryman & Bell, 2007) and conducted with stakeholders of Total in order to complement the information

collected through the articles and illustrate them through the verbatim. Such material has been organized under a temporal perspective considering the date of creation of the company, in order to try to better understand its history and its main practices regarding its socially responsible strategies as well as the management of the Erika crisis in which tons of oil were spilled on the French north-western coast in 1999. Therefore, this study can be characterized by a longitudinal *a posteriori* research (Forgues & Vandangeon-Derumez, 2007).

***** Table 2 about here *****

DATA ANALYSIS

Based on the literature and documental research, the interviews and the observations made during the realization of this study, a data triangulation were established (Yin, 2013), which allowed to improve the measure and description precision, as well as to take into consideration the research question under two complementary angles in order to better analyze and interpret certain results. This case study was conducted following an exploratory research parameter by the transcription and analysis of the interviews; the organization and analysis of the collected data according to a chronological order; and the identification and analysis of certain particularities of Total in the French context (Richardson, 1999).

Following the identification of the press articles about the Erika accident, such event and its consequences were analyzed in two steps (Zietsma and Lawrence, 2010): a) a classification based on different crisis typologies from literature (e.g.: Mitroff et al., 1996) in order to better understanding the crisis; 2) the objective of the first step was to analyze and classify the crisis itself ("what") whereas the second one focused on analyzing how the oil company Total responded to this event and the reason why it put into practice certain socially responsible actions of crisis management ("why"). During such procedure, several aspects that may have influenced the company's decisions were taken into consideration, such as temporal, political, and cultural factors.

MAIN FINDINGS AND ELEMENTS FOR DISCUSSION

Being economically viable and assuming the consequences of their actions: that is what stakeholders demand from organizations (Carroll, 1991). However, stakeholders rarely have the same objectives (Clarkson, 1995), since some of them may demand higher profits whereas others will ask for more transparency. MNCs should therefore be able to pursue such collective goals which continuously vary according to individual interests, especially when dealing with environmental and social issues (Svensson et al., 2010). However such organizations must be careful because having collective strategies is not always a virtue (Bresser & Harl, 1986). MNCs must remain competitive and they still have to look for a more stabilize environment even for a limited period of time. Even if they find difficulties, as for example a lack of time or a high degree of uncertainty, MNCs have to rely on the ability of their managers to delay dysfunctions and to anticipate the future benefits of these collective strategies. Through the development of human resources tools or a culture of flexibility, they may transform those weaknesses into strengths.

Taking that into consideration within the context of this paper, the analysis of the Erika case through the perspective of the model proposed allowed observing that when the critical phase appears (Table 1), strong emotions and a short communion appear among stakeholders, especially when social or environmental issues are concerned. In fact, when the oil spill happened and even if the loss of human lives was low, the consequences over the marine life was so important enough to attract a high interest from the media. Total lost market shares and its reputation was deeply impacted. The external effects were important and have conducted many consumers to boycott the brand. However, all the stakeholders have not had the same attitude: for example, after a sudden and slight change, the investors remained confident as it can be noticed through the stock prices stabilization at this period of time. By integrating conscientiously stakeholders' demands in such context, it is possible to observe

that Total gradually reinforced its CSR strategy moving from a reactive posture to a more proactive one through a back and forth strategy between incremental and drastic changes.

Also, the results highlight the existence of *a chasm* during the management of crisis, which means, a short period of time were some reconfigurations about management occur. Such *chasm* would assure that CSR practices are well-accepted, shared and planned within companies (Balogun, 2003). That is because such critical moments allow reconsidering aspects of organizational practices such as certain isolated practices, which are not considered important before the period of chasm but that are the object of reconsideration and become important after it. In fact, when critical events arise, strong emotions are shared and this can help to develop a *status quo* around the need and the way of change (Kübler-Ross, 1997). Thus, when considering the role of the agents of change, it remains that the more they develop their empathy, the more the chasm period is productive.

Moreover, our results allowed observing several strategic practices that are not considered independently but successively, especially in what concerns the works of Carroll (1979) and Martinet & Payaud (2008). By sharing their emotions when practicing strategy, individuals understand each other and learn from past experiences: they become then more open to change.

***** Figure 1 about here *****

The challenge is to reach a mass diffusion of CSR across *the chasm*, which represents the gap between two different worlds. One world is constituted of easily convincible people and, whilst the other world is composed of pragmatic people to whom risk is surmountable only if clear references have been established. By crossing the chasm, companies move from a close-culture which consists on individually proposing ideas without taking into account stakeholders' demands to an open-culture where problems are solved collectively by stakeholders. Such attitude can be summarized as follows: *"in a close-culture, we know what*

is good for you" and *"in an open-culture, you know what is good for you and we are going to help you".* In this case, "you" stands for *stakeholders* and "we" for *managers*.

The diffusion of CSR may allow the connection between two very different social worlds, which could be possible thanks to the intervention of the agents of change (Rogers, 1983) who facilitate a mutual understanding of individuals. In the proactive system, the agents of change have to take into account the feedback from the reactive system, since *"by understanding the needs and problems, a change agent can selectively transmit only the information that is useful"* (Rogers, 1983, p. 315).

CONCLUSION

In theoretical terms, our paper contributes to the analysis of crisis management under the perspective of the process of change and the concept of corporate social responsibility. In fact, when we successively consider the five phases of crisis (preliminary, acute, critical, rebalancing, and analysis and change), it appears that the critical phase creates strong emotions and a sort of communion among individuals, especially when social or environmental issues are concerned, like it was possible to observe in the study case developed by this paper. At this point, a more enthusiastic approach begins to emerge, since the will for changing becomes more present and individuals start trusting each other. Innovative strategic behaviors are welcomed because individuals do not want to go through traumatic experiences again. Moreover, we try to further develop the concept of *chasm* as it was described by Rogers (1983).

Considering managerial contributions, our paper may allow managers to better comprehend the dynamics of change through crisis and CSR. For individuals, critical events imply strong emotional aspects that managers should understand. Well-analyzed, critical events become then an element of strength to face resistance against change.

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TABLES AND FIGURES
(in order of appearance in the text)

Table 1: Crisis management within socially responsible change process

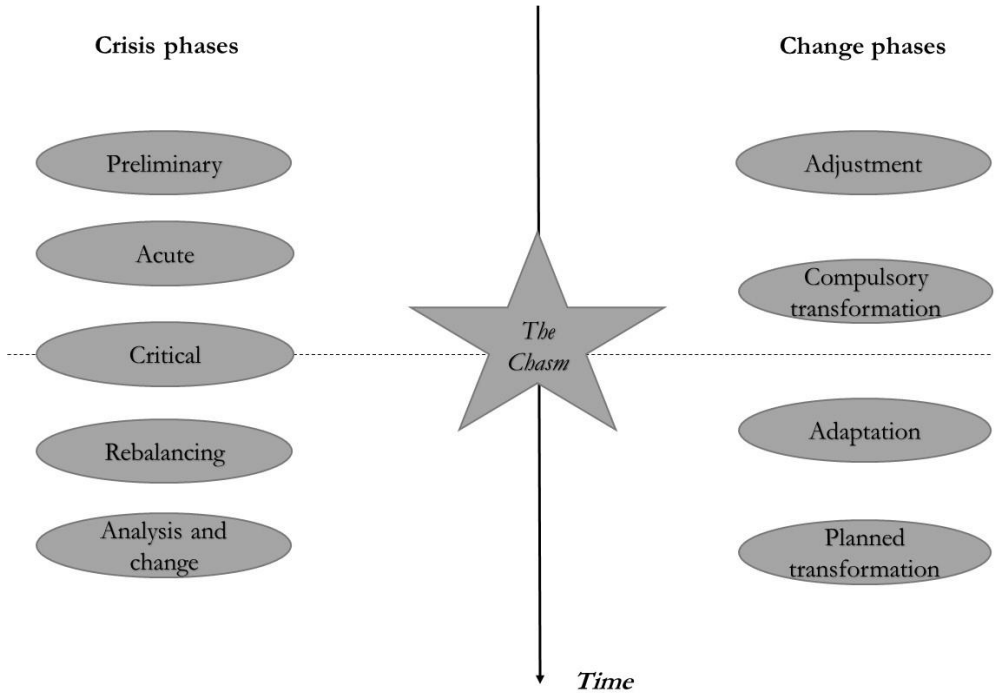
Crisis phases	Magnitude of change	Nature of change	Change phases	CSR strategizing	CSR Strategy
Preliminary	Reactive	Incremental	Adjustment	To avoid incoherencies	Reactive / Cosmetic
Acute	Reactive	Drastic	Compulsory transformation	To question the implicit thinking	Defensive / Annex
Critical	*The chasm*				
Rebalancing	Proactive	Incremental	Adaptation	To anticipate the needs of change	Accommodative / Integrated
Analysis and change	Proactive	Drastic	Planned transformation	To plan a drastic change	Proactive / Bottom of the pyramid

Source: Based on the works of Carroll (1979); Robert & Verpeaux (1991); Roux-Dufort (2003); Autissier & Vandangeon-Derumez (2005); Martinet & Payaud (2008) and Johnson & al. (2011).

Table 2: Overview of the collected information

Event, Date & Characteristics	Period of observation of the crisis and press articles collection	Number of press articles collected about Total	Number of press articles regarding Erika	Number of CSR actions related to Erika identified in the press
Oil tanker Erika Shipwreck and oil spill France (1999)	13/12/1999 to 29/11/2010 (about 10 years)	3.755	488	13

Figure 1: Role of crisis on the creation of *the chasm*



Source: inspired by the works of Robert & Verpeaux (1991); Roux-Dufort (2003) and Autissier & Vandangeon-Derumez (2005)