



REPOSITIONING THE SPOTLIGHTS OF PROACTIVE BEHAVIOR: FROM AN ENVIRONMENTAL FOCUS TO THE SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

Amid the influences from the pressure identified in the present dynamics of the market, the enterprises are required to get a position, responding to what is being imposed or assumed as a proactive behavior. Under the context of sustainability, this type of behavior is being related to an environmental dimension, under the definition of environmental proactivity. However, there is not a clear approach for the social dimension, which denotes a gap for research, involving explicitly the environmental and social aspects of the actions taken by enterprises, called proactivity of sustainable practices. Furthermore, the idea of proactive behavior can be considered as favorable strategy to introduce sustainability in supply chains. In this sense, this study aims to propose a set of indicators of proactivity of sustainable practices that does not only consider the social dimension. Therefore, the study is characterized as a theoretical study. Hence, it is understood that to move away from a "limited" perspective to the field of environmental dimension, and driving the searchlight of proactivity towards a better alignment to sustainability (while also focusing on the social aspects), it is seen that, through the practices and changes in behavior, enterprises can contribute to a more sustainable development.

Keywords: Proactivity; Sustainable Practices; Indicators.

1. INTRODUCTION

Under a perspective of changes seen in different segments of society, it is more and more frequent the debate regarding a better performance coming from enterprises with regards to their new operating profile. Within this context, not only the financial issues must be considered, but also a socio-environmental view has to be applied, progressing into the discussions about a more sustainable development. Thus, the basic idea to understand the definition of sustainable development is related to the harmonization of fundamental dimensions (social, financial, and environmental), aimed to support the necessities of present and future generations, and from modifications in the processes of production and consumption generated so far (Elkington, 2001; Sachs, 2007; WCDE, 1987).

Based on this scenario, companies started to realize the necessity to consider the associated dimensions of sustainability (which until now these dimensions were not part

of business interests), and started to notice the possible influences and impacts of socio-environmental issues in their operations (Brito *et Berardi*, 2010). In order to enterprises to incorporate these discussions in their business, the management needs to be prepared to deal with market variations, with the behavior stances, and with the resulting performance of business strategies. Therefore, the incorporation of socio-environmental issues into companies' business can assist the development of strategies with a differential over the opponents, as well as in a better interaction with stakeholders, which generates the continuation of activities for a certain period of time (Silva *et Santos*, 2011).

Amid the influences of many sources of pressure identified in the present market dynamics, more and more enterprises are led to take a stand, either by responding to what is imposed to them, or by assuming a proactive behavior to find better alternatives for survival (Oliver, 1991). According



to Kamia *et Porto* (2009), it is defined as a proactive behavior a search for solutions or even by the anticipation of practices in comparison to the opponents. This means that using this market conduct is to anticipate to what is going to be presented, inside and internal practice and a search for new behaviors in inter-organizational environment. For Pagell *et Wu* (2009) and Beske (2012), to use the idea of proactive behavior can be considered as one of the most favorable strategies to introduce sustainability in supply chains.

Under the context of sustainability, the proactive behavior is being significantly studied regarding the environmental dimension, originated in the definition of environmental proactivity. This definition can be described as a volunteered decision by the enterprises, despite the actions demanded by law, to reduce the impacts of their operations in the natural environment. Then, a company that inserts these practices with the objective to improve its environmental performance, or to establish systems that will enable this improvement in the future, can be defined as an environmentally proactive enterprise (González-Benito, 2008; Buysse *et Verbeke*, 2003). Studies have shown the relationship between enterprises' environmental proactive behavior and their efforts to achieve sustainable levels in their operations (Leppelt *et al.*, 2013; Kiron *et al.*, 2012). However, such researches end up not evaluating clearly the social dimension of this type of behavior.

The focus on one single dimension of sustainability is a challenge to have more studies about sustainability in companies and in supply chains. Then, it is observed a gap to be filled, involving the aspects related to environmental and social proactivity – in this article, named proactivity of sustainable practices –, which includes explicitly the environmental and social aspects of the actions taken by companies. Therefore, the goal is to achieve the proactivity of sustainable practices. According to the researches of Kiron *et al.* (2012), many companies have widened their pro-sustainable initiatives, contrary to what the common sense would expect if sustainability represented, in fact, only some extra organizational costs, a passing management style, or even a luxury for certain industrial segments. This result suggests that companies are more and more conscious about the relevance of sustainability as a requisite of differentiation, and source of competitive advantage in the market they participate.

Based on these arguments, the present article aims to propose a set of indicators of proactivity of sustainable practices, in order to design an agenda of research that does not only consider the environmental dimension, but that aggregates the aspects linked to the social dimension. For such, the study is characterized as theoretical. However, it does not close itself to analyze the elements from literature on the topic, but as a reflexive text that aims to establish relation-

ships, to converge lines of thoughts, and to propose questionings that enrich the debate of the topic. Therefore, it is identified the contributive characteristic of the discussion, once the studies that amplify the environmental perspective facilitate the incorporation and the comprehension of a wider view regarding sustainability. To better understand the discussion, this study is divided in five sections, besides this introduction, with the goal to achieve the proposed target.

2. SUSTAINABILITY AND THE CORPORATIONS

Today's social behavior and consumption habits related to the waste of natural resources have their derivative impacts, in special, from the industrial pressure, population growth, and accumulation of wealth of the few, leading to a series of issues of a socially unfair, environmentally unbalanced, and economically unfeasible model (Claro *et al.*, 2008). Under this perspective, considering the pressures in order to rethink the present model of production, processes and products must be modified in order to reduce their socio-environmental impacts, and to guarantee levels of production and consumption that are more sustainable (Vanchon *et Klassen*, 2006). As a consequence, it is necessary to recognize and to develop new life styles, with new methods of production and new standards of consumption (Schumacher, 2001).

Elkington (2001) and Fenker (2012) argue that capitalism and sustainability do not generate an easy alliance, which suggests that there is a necessity to create elements capable of design a new paradigm of development. This change can simultaneously designate the arrival of a new style of development through the perception there is a possibility that another form of development becomes a subsidy to maintain the society, and of a new approach for planning and management, which present practices are redirected to more holistic and collective actions (Sachs, 2008). Therefore, to make them more effective, the alternatives for the problems originated from capitalism need to allow a disruption, a questioning, an origin of new ways of thinking, and the performance of modifications when incorporating social and ecological definitions (Fenker, 2012).

Within this context, the result from the preoccupations regarding the crescent global awareness of environmental issues, as well as the socio-economic questions related to inequality and poverty, fomented the creation of the definition for sustainable development (Hopwood *et al.*, 2005). After the release of the report "*Our Common Future*", the definition that is most used is the one that says sustainable development "satisfies the necessities of the present, without compromising future generations to provide for their necessities" (WCED, 1987, p.43). This definition open spaces for countless interpretations, expressions, and conceptions,



without creating a single consensus (Claro *et al.*, 2008). One of the most published perspectives is the concept of *Triple Bottom Line* (TBL), from Elkington (2001), who says that sustainability must incorporate, at the same time, the social, environmental, and economical dimensions.

It is assumed that companies must contribute to a more sustainable development. The restructuring of business behavior in different economical areas to a more responsible perspective facilitates the reduction of environmental, social, and economical issues (Abreu, 2001). Then, into the business field, TBL has the goal to analyze sustainability as beyond the traditional mindset of profit, returns on investments, and generation of value for shareholders, including social and environmental elements to the equation (Slaper *et al.*, 2011; Elkington, 2001). With this scenario of transformation in the strategies and practices in enterprises, there is a possibility to restructure not only the formats of production, but also the mode of consumption of the whole population.

Hence, a new development view must be aligned to the decrease of production of goods, and the restructuring of service providers that generate large environmental and social impacts, and also, the decrease of the present rates of consumption in society (Schumacher, 2001). Based on these arguments, the enterprises must rethink their strategies, inserting sustainability in their businesses, contributing to improve quality of life into society, and the defense of natural resources (Claro *et al.* 2008). However, the introduction of sustainability in business practices should not be considered an increase in operational costs, on the other hand, it should be interpreted as an opportunity for business to acquire a competitive advantage, to improve their image, to reinforce their reputation in the market, and to increase their profitability (Orsato, 2006; Neves *et al.* De Barcellos, 2013).

Thus, it is necessary to start a debate the insertion of sustainability into the enterprises not linked to the issue of “introducing or not”, and moving to the questions of “when and how to introduce” the topic (Orsato, 2006), as the worries with the people and the environment are expressed in relevant variables in the processes and in the decision making steps. This perspective is more relevant when the supply chain is observed, and the importance of the role the focal company (with its strategies and behaviors) have in the interorganizational relationship. For Zhu *et al.* (2008), due to the complexity of the issues in the supply chain, it is hard for companies to respond to different stakeholders. In this sense, sustainability must be conceived as an element that searches to involve all stakeholders in a specific context, for changes in behavior and in the responsibility in regards to environmental, social, and economical issues, which leads to the introduction of business strategies legitimated by society (Koplin *et al.*, 2007).

3. STRATEGY AND PROACTIVE BEHAVIOR

For a continuous permanence in the market, the enterprises need to create strategies that guide their activities. Such strategies can be defined as relationships oriented between the internal aspects of the organization (resources and abilities), and the opportunities and risks created by the external environment (Grant, 1991). In the literature about the topic, the most disseminated idea is aligned to the organizational perspective, which means, the strategy must be used to guide which practices and actions can be performed related to the other actors that interact with the organizations. For Porter (1991), the success of the company is related to the way it positions in its objective into the market, as well as with its effective involvement in the circumstances and behavior of the company against the market. Therefore, the discussion about behavior assumes a strategic view.

The idea of organizational behavior is linked to the concept of how the company perceives the market nuances and models its practices to the demands and needs of this market, which changes in business attitude seems to be more and more demanding. In this sense, Robbins (2005) affirms that organizational behavior is a field of study that investigates the impact individuals, groups, and the structure has upon companies, with the intention to apply this knowledge to improve effectiveness. Then, behavior and its many levels can have its aspects analyzed, such as: values; attitudes; work satisfaction; personality; perception; motivation; and group work.

Based on this understanding and on the emergency of a perspective worried with the reduction of socio-environmental impacts from the side of enterprises, Abreu (2011) affirms that is necessary to incorporate a new profile of behavior, which takes into consideration the environmental issues. Then, from a better positioning between structure, conduct, and performance, it is possible to adopt socio-environmental strategies that result in the incorporation of more responsibilities, and that improve the dynamics company-market (Silva *et al.*, 2011), once strategy influences in the behavior, and in turn, behavior influences in the design of strategies, according to a logic of recursion and feedback. Considering that the changes in organizational behavior directly interfere in the social corporative performance (Sethi, 1975) – which is connected to the culture of a company – it is possible to observe and infer that there is a process of causality between these dimensions, which means, there is a direct relationship between organizational behavior and performance. When working with the idea of business social behavior, for example, it is possible to have, at the same time, a social performance of the enterprise.

Within the context company-society, it is seen a growing preoccupation from the part of the organizations with issues



related to society and environment. Then, companies try to amplify their understanding in how enterprises can assist to make an effective use of practices associated to a more sustainable development. That is the study of the socio-environmental business behavior (SEBB) as means to better understand the social business role considering the expectations, necessities, and pressures that influence participating companies of a network of interactions to adopt a more responsible behavior towards the perception of the importance of their participation in the local social processes (Santos, 2009). It is possible to relate this view of behavior to the level of involvement that the company has related to sustainability, when considering the responsibility of the companies and their practices in society.

In the discussions about the strategic positioning an organization can have related to its behavior, it is important to note: the proactivity; the reactivity; and the responsibility. For the issues raised in the present theoretical proposal, it is considered as the central question to be discussed and to have a deeper understanding the aspects related to proactivity, which, in this case, are linked to sustainability. The proactive behavior is defined as the capacity enterprises have in creating demands and drive the market, differentiating their position of leadership in the company compared to their followers (Bateman *et Crant*, 1999 *apud* Kamia *et Porto*, 2009). In order to make this position concrete, companies must be dynamic with their stakeholders in their interactions, in order to improve their strategic performance.

In regards to proactivity, several studies link the environmental proactive stance of companies to their efforts to become more sustainable. On the other hand, these researches have connected the proactive behavior towards sustainability to the improvement of the environmental performance, or even to the reduction of the impact on the environment, ignoring the social dimension of sustainability, concentrating only on the environmental dimension of TBL (Leppelt *et al.*, 2013). The social aspects are being disregarded in researches and practices of the past (Pagell *et Wu*, 2009). In order to consider sustainability, it is necessary to involve the three dimensions of TBL as a whole. The insertion of issues related to the social and environmental dimensions in enterprises and their supply chains require new understandings, which indicates the necessity of many researches and experiments (Carvalho *et Barbieri*, 2013).

Based on these arguments, and admitting that there are scarce sources of researches that relate the proactive behavior to sustainability, the present background of theoretical study is related to a more strategic perspective, considering the recursive movement in which it has with the behavior of organizations, as well as an influence such relationship can have throughout a supply chain – once, for an effective insertion of sustainability in organizational

relationships, for many times, must start from individual practices and actions adopted by each company, and in the capacity this company has in disseminating these practices and actions to all actors it has a bond. It is necessary to work with this idea, once, according to Pagell *et Wu* (2009), proactivity can be considered one of the main motivators to build a more sustainable supply chain.

4. ENVIRONMENTAL PROACTIVITY: A FIRST STEP

In the midst of the debates so far presented, under de context of sustainability incorporated to business strategies and policies, it is considered that this discussion is a first step related to the proactive behavior, due to the lack of researches in this topic, in special, the ones related to the aspects of the social dimension. As in other topics, for example, in supply chains: once it assumed an environmental characteristic in the beginning and moving to the discussion of sustainability in this area, it maintained the focus in the environmental dimension, therefore proactivity has mainly assumed the logics of a reduction of environmental impacts caused by business activities.

Considering the environmental dimension, it is seen that the number of organizations that adopt environmental practices in their daily strategies and operations is continuously increasing (Sarkis, 2002). The reoccurrence of the introduction of these initiatives by organizations originated a classification of environmental behavior in companies, which encompasses two extreme definitions: proactivity, and environmental reactivity (González-Benito *et* González-Benito, 2005; 2006; González-Benito, 2008). In this sense, environmental proactivity can be conceived as the volunteered implementation of practices of management destined to improve the environmental performance, or to establish the systems that will make this improvement possible, with the goal to perform actions beyond those demanded by law or regulations (Buyse *et Verbeke*, 2003).

Environmental proactivity deals with practices and actions that were volunteered developed by an organization, with the objective to minimize the environmental impact caused by its operations (Abreu *et al.*, 2011). Therefore, it can be manifested by countless volunteer practices that can present various objectives, opening space that different environmental strategies and behaviors can be developed (González-Benito *et* González-Benito, 2006; González-Benito, 2008). The emergence of these practices is motivated by three reasons: (a) increase of the environmental awareness of society and the fear of the organization related to its image and reputation; (b) the effect of operational optimization due to environmental effective practices; and (c) ethical issues in which owners, managers, and shareholders of the enterprises have to face (González-Benito *et* González-Benito, 2005).



Environmental proactivity considers the business action as a response to existing pressures, in the sense to reduce the environmental impact caused by company's operations, reflecting the commitment of the enterprise with the natural environment it is inserted (Abreu *et al.*, 2011; González-Benito, 2008). On the other hand, environmental reactivity usually arises in opposition to environmental proactivity (González-Benito, 2008). In general, proactive companies implement more environmental practices beyond the limit required by law and regulations, while reactive ones only try to fulfill the requirements of the legislation and regulatory requirements (Kumar *et Chandrakar*, 2012). Environmental reactivity consists in performing only the minimal mandatory changes needed to respect environmental legislation, also seen as zero proactivity (González-Benito, 2008; González-Benito *et González-Benito*, 2006).

According to Abreu *et al.* (2011), environmental reactivity is the model of corporate behavior which deals with the environmental issues in the companies only as a passive or an obligation. In this context, the 'motivation' factor must be consolidated as a differentiator of the mandatory minimal changes resulting from the fulfillment of legal regulation (point zero proactivity) and the steps voluntarily taken by companies to reduce their impact in the environment (proactive behavior) (González-Benito *et González-Benito*, 2010). Then, it is necessary to understand environmental proactivity as a regular and continuous strategy, incorporated to company planning, and not linked to the main idea as a volunteer action or punctual actions dissociated from corporative strategy (Abreu *et al.*, 2011).

Environmental proactivity involves a shared view of the future, in a long term, in which environmental preoccupations prevail in the decision making processes of the enterprises. However, for Buysse *et Verbeke* (2003), the effective generation of a shared view seems to be dependent on the presence of formal motivational systems, such as the ISO 14000 standard, in order to recognize environmental behavior.

González-Benito *et González-Benito* (2005; 2006) establish a functional classification for environmental behavior based on environmental practices related in literature, divided in three categories: organizational and planning practices; operational practices; and communication practices. The first category expresses proactive actions related to the implementation of an environmental policy in the company, the development of proceedings to define environmental objectives, the selection and implementation of environmental actions, the evaluation of results of such actions or the allocation of environmental responsibilities. Therefore, they reflect the level in which an environmental management system is being develop-

ped and implemented, according to the proposed environmental proactive behavior (González-Benito *et González-Benito*, 2005; 2006).

The second category— of operational practices – involves changes in the production and operational systems, which can be classified in two groups: operational practices related to the product, and operational practices related to the process. The first group represents proactive actions focused on the concept or on the development of more environmentally correct products. The second group, on its turn, encompasses the proactive actions aimed to the construction and the implementation of environmentally conscious methods and processes of construction and operation (González-Benito *et González-Benito*, 2005; 2006). It was seen that some of these actions affect internal processes, including remediation and control practices, and prevention practices, while others influence in external processes, dealing with the interactions of the company, members of its supply chain, or other stakeholders.

In the end, the category 'communication practices' includes actions that aim to transmit information regarding the steps taken to reduce environmental impact of the enterprise to its stakeholders. These practices are commonly the main path to establish relationships with the interested parts, transmitting the environmental commitment of the company (González-Benito *et González-Benito*, 2005; 2006). It is valid to mention that organizational and planning practices, and the planning and practices of communication do not contribute, in fact, with the improvement of environmental performance. However, these practices are easily seen by stakeholders and have the power to influence the opinion of the general public.

These categories have the potential to influence in the performance of business – and not the environmental performance – once they can minimize the pressure from the interested parts and attract a higher number of clients to the company. The practices that can really modify the environmental performance of companies are the operational ones, either aimed to the products, or related to the processes, which on the other side, are less perceived by the general public (González-Benito *et González-Benito*, 2006).

From this classification, González-Benito *et González-Benito* (2005) observed the empirical analysis of the relationship between environmental proactivity and business performance, with a sample of 182 Spanish companies. To measure environmental proactivity, the authors used a list of practices, in which the responded must have marked the rate of implementation of each one, under a likert scale. Chart 01 presents the categories related with the practices analyzed. After collecting the data, the analysis of the main



components resulted in four factors: organizational and planning practices; operational practices of external processes; product design practices; and operational practices of internal processes. The communicational practices were divided between the organization and planning factor, and the operational factor of external processes (González-Benito et González-Benito, 2005).

The division of communicative practices was not only considered surprising by the authors, once organizational and planning practices englobe environmental certifications, usually associated to a desire to publicize the environmental behavior of the enterprise; and that operational practices of external processes demand a relationship with other agents, informing them about the environmental practices of the company. Then, the four factors reflect the four categories thru which environmental proactivity can take place: planning and organization; external processes; product design; and internal production processes. The results demonstrate that some practices have a positive and significant effect on some objectives of operational performance (such as practices over external processes), and the performance objectives in marketing (for example, practices over product design). Furthermore, the findings of the study partially confirmed the existence of a positive relationship between environmental proactivity and business performance (González-Benito et González-Benito, 2005).

Chart 01. Practices of environmental proactivity and their respective categories

Category	Practices
Organization and planning	Explicit definition of environmental policy
	Clear objectives and environmental plans in a long term
	Well defined environmental responsibilities
	Employees dedicated to environmental management in full time
	Training programs for managers and employees about the environment
	Measurement and evaluation systems for environmental performance
	Environmental emergency plans
Operational (related to the product)	Substitution of pollutants and dangerous materials/parts
	Design focused on the reduction of resources consumption and generation the generation of waste during production and distribution
	Design focused on the reduction of resources consumption and generation the generation of waste in the use of products
	Design focused on dismantling, re-use, and recycling

Operational (related to the process)	Environmental criteria in selecting suppliers
	Preference for green products in company's purchases
	Use of cleaner transportation systems
	Recyclable or reusable packaging/containers in logistics
	Ecological materials for primary packaging
	Recuperation and recycling systems
	Responsible destination of waste and recyclable residue (separation and preparation)
	Control of emissions in filters and in the end of production line
	Design of processes focused in the reduction of consumption of energy and natural resources in operations
	Planning and control of production focusing in reduction of waste and optimization the use of materials
Acquisition of technologies/equipment considered "clean"	
Communication	Periodic production of environmental reports
	Sponsoring events/collaboration with environmental-ecological organizations
	Environmental arguments in company's marketing campaigns
	Regular volunteer information regarding environmental management for clients and institutions

Source: González-Benito et González-Benito (2005).

Under Brazilian context, Abreu *et al.* (2011) empirically evaluated the influence of the pressure from stakeholders into environmental proactivity in 112 companies of medium and large size located in the country. For the authors, the proactivity considers behavior as a response to the pressure of stakeholders, in order to minimize the environmental impact caused by their operations, however going beyond in actions that are additional to those demanded by law. Then, the hypothesis of the research considered the environmental pressure from various groups of stakeholders, positively influencing environmental proactivity of Brazilian enterprises. The researchers tested the existence of three categories, as proposed by González-Benito *et* González-Benito (2005; 2006), from the actions, including the existence of environmental auditing, investment of the company in cleaner technologies, substituting the energy matrix, environmental educational programs, among others (Abreu *et al.*, 2011). The practices applied in the study are presented on Chart 02.

Through factorial analysis, the elements related to the implementation of programs to generate environmental policies, to define environmental criteria, and of operational processes were merged in the category 'planning'. The factors related to investments in technologies to reduce consumption, and in recycling programs and consumption of the resources involved in the productive process, and yet,



the modification of product projects for operational effectiveness were united in the category 'operations'. In the end, the elements linked to the publication of reports of environmental accountability and the use of advertisement based on the environmental dimension of sustainability were placed together under the category 'communication'. The authors considered that this result conditions the selected variables in a representative list of the practices of environmental proactivity – besides some items do not match the expected category, according to the studies of González-Benito *et* González-Benito (2006). The results found confirm the hypothesis that stakeholders generate a pressure over the companies, positively influencing their environmental proactivity (Abreu *et al.*, 2011).

Chart 02. Indicators of environmental proactivity

Indicators of environmental proactivity
Program of environmental education for staff
Evaluation of risks/environmental aspects, and of health and safety
Senior manager dedicated to socio-environmental issues
Staff members working full time in environmental management and social projects
Defined and publicized environmental policies
Socio-environmental objectives and planning in long term clearly defined
Criteria for environment, and health and safety at work to select suppliers
Criteria for environment, and health and safety at work to evaluate suppliers
Periodic auditing in environment, health and safety at work
Response program to emergency situations
Pollution treatment and control systems
Operational proceedings written to control environmental, health, and safety risks
Product project aimed to dismantling, reuse, and recycling
Analysis of the life cycle of the product
Project of the productive processes with the focus on reducing energy and natural resources
Substitution of dangerous or pollutant materials in products
Investments in technologies to reduce CO2 emissions
Programs of energy effectiveness
Programs of recycling and reduction of solid waste
Programs of recycling and reduction of water consumption
Substitution of fossil fuels for renewable energy sources (photo-voltaic cells, solar energy, wind energy)
Substitution of fossil fuels for alternative energy sources (natural gas, biomass, geothermal energy)
Use of ecological and social arguments in advertisement and communications with the public
Clear information to the public regarding environmental, safety, and/or health risks of the product
Seminars about sustainability for executives
Periodical publication of sustainability reports

Sponsoring of environment events
Insurance to cover potential environmental risks
Remediation of (passive) environmental damage
Protection/preservation of species and habitats

Source: Abreu *et al.* (2011).

From these indicators, it is seen that some variables tend to represent aspects of social dimension, however, while limiting the discussion to the environmental dimension, the social aspects are considered only under this context. Based on the understanding that sustainability can be inserted by a company over its supply chain through a proactive behavior, the present discussion becomes relevant by dealing with the topic under a macro perspective, including the three dimensions of sustainability. According to Pagell *et* Wu (2009), the possible contribution of proactive behavior to a more sustainable supply chain, as also discussed by Beske (2012) in his argumentation about the capacity for innovation, is presented by the proposal of indicators that better represent the discussion, involving the indicators related to the environmental, social, and economical dimensions that compose the idea of sustainability.

5. PROACTIVITY OF SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES: A PROPOSAL

Based on the discussions presented in this research, it is possible to observe that some authors connect the environmental proactive behavior of an enterprise to its efforts to make itself more sustainable, in face to the challenges of the new paradigm of sustainability (Abreu *et al.*, 2011). Besides using the expression sustainability and identifying the necessity of a shared view, various studies relate the classification supported only by the environmental strategies, not considering the social issues. However, according to the triple bottom line concept, companies must develop their initiatives aimed to the social elements, together with the environmental and economic aspects, in order to have their behavior to be considered more sustainable. Few studies used classifications to describe the proactivity in the sustainable practices of the enterprises, openly including environmental and social aspects, such as the case of the studies of Kiron *et al.* (2012) and Leppelt *et al.* (2013) – which do not necessarily deal with the definition of proactivity.

Kiron *et al.* (2012) argument that companies that are investing in sustainable practices, and achieving positive results with such practices, are more favorable to have better competitive advantage. This group of companies is called by the authors as "harvesters", and are distinguished from the "non-harvesters" in four important dimensions: (a) organizational support; (b) operations; (c) collaboration; and, (d) good intention in changing the organizational model as providing answers to the sus-



tainability issues. Then, it can be seen that “harvesting companies” have a set of characteristics that support the development of sustainable practices, at the same time that sustainability contributes to the growth of their profitability, their margins, and their market share (Kiron *et al.*, 2012). Consequently, the enterprises must direct their efforts to become part of the “harvester” group.

In turn, Leppelt *et al.* (2013) approached proactivity in supply chain when investigating the sustainable practices associated to the management of relationships with suppliers of seven focal companies from Europe. In order to do so, the authors defined a classification for the organizations, according to the sustainable index of the Dow Jones Stock Market, and the index of corporate responsibility FTSE4Good, distinguishing themselves as ‘leaders in sustainability’ and ‘followers in sustainability’. The companies present in the list of both indexes were considered ‘leaders in sustainability’; while the enterprises that were listed only in one index or in none were placed as ‘followers in sustainability’. According to the study, the listing of these indexes was considered as an objective indication to determine if a company is ‘leader in sustainability’, once its admission in such listings depends on the fulfillment of sustainability criteria.

Hence, the companies that are ‘leaders in sustainability’ are those whose actions are based in environmental, social, and economical aspects, besides investing intensively in relationship practices with suppliers, with the goal to manage sustainability beyond its organizational limits. The ‘leaders in sustainability’ have an integrated structure of sustainability practices, besides those mandatory by legislation, involving the management of the relationship with suppliers into those practices. On its turn, the ‘followers’ have more punctual actions, which are not connected to their business strategies. Therefore, the ‘leaders in sustainability’ have better recognition from their stakeholders, while considering sustainability an important dimension under their corporate strategy (Leppelt *et al.*, 2013). It is important to highlight that both enterprises that are ‘leaders in sustainability’ and the ‘followers in sustainability’ are focal companies, or in other words, they are responsible for the management of a supply chain.

Hence, proactive companies perform their operations focusing on the reduction of their impacts (Orsato, 2006). They must replicate this behavior to all members of their supply chain (Buyse *et Verbeke*, 2003), which demands that more sustainable initiatives are introduced in the operations of the chain. Besides that, it is necessary that the companies’ managers have a more proactive behavior in understanding that sustainability is an organizational compromise (Pagell *et Wu*, 2009). For the purposes of this study, it is proposed that companies have a proactive behavior towards sustainable practices, which can also contribute to the study of

sustainability in their supply chain, through the articulation of its links. For Sharfman *et al.* (2009), as more companies present a proactive behavior in sustainable practices, more other companies will follow this pattern, collaborating to have more sustainable supply chains.

The proactivity of sustainable practices amplifies the definition on the environmental dimension, by inserting social aspects in the idea of sustainability, considering the integration of the dimensions of the topic proposed by Elkington (2001). In this sense, proactivity of sustainable practices can be fully defined as: the adoption of actions, performed voluntarily by companies, with the objective to improve the environmental and social performances, beyond the legal requirements. Then, the proactive enterprise affirms its preoccupation and its compromise with the society and the natural environment in which it is inserted.

To better represent this definition, according to the objective of this research, it was proposed a set of indicators of proactivity in sustainable practices, aiming to effectively aggregate the aspects related to the social dimension to the study of proactive behavior. In Chart 03 there is the presentation of the indicators of the proactive behavior of enterprises related to sustainability, listing down the dimensions under the Triple Bottom Line. In regards to the environmental issues, the sustainable practices were based on the studies of González-Benito *et González-Benito* (2005) and Abreu *et al.* (2011), while the elements related to the social aspects were based on standards related to social responsibility of companies, such as SA 8000 (2008), NBR 16000 (2012), and ISO 26000 (2010). These practices will be used in this study to observe the proactive behavior of the companies observed.

Published in 1997, the Standard SA 8000 is based on nine requisites: child labor; compulsory and forced work; safety and health at work; liberty for association and right to collective negotiation; discrimination; disciplinary practice; workload; remuneration; and management system. In regards to the international standard ISO 26000, published in the year of 2010, including the directives about social responsibility, as well as demonstrating principles, practices, implementation, and promotion of a socially responsible behavior in intra- and inter-organizational environment. In the end, the NBR 16000 is a Brazilian standard published in the year of 2004, based on the methodology Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) applied to social responsibility. It is important to mention that these standards ensures that the company has the minimal requisites of a social responsibility management system – and it does not certifies that the enterprise is effectively socially responsible.

Considering the indicators presented on Chart 03, all support the comprehension on the proactive behavior for sustainable practices, as well as to understand which strategies



can be used by companies to identify their position in comparison to other actors of their supply chain. Then, from the 46 indicators selected, it was necessary to balance out the contribution of each dimension (environmental and social) for sustainability. It is important to mention that economical issues cannot be left behind, once the company is contributing to the sustainability when its existence generates positive results under economical terms, seen by its profitability (Orsato, 2006; Carvalho *et al.*, 2013). It was defined not to highlight a single category in the group of actions related to the proactivity of sustainable practices. Then, this research assumed that the economical dimension emerges as a *sine qua non* condition to the operation and to business survival in the market, as well as to sustainability.

It is believed that business managers can use the proactivity indicators of sustainable practices to analyze the level of insertion of sustainability in their activities and strategies. Yet, researchers of the topic can use the indicators as base for their studies about the introduction of sustainability in companies and supply chains. Alves *et al.* Nascimento (2016) performed a study to analyze the volunteer adoption of sustainability in an enterprise. In order to do so, the authors based on the indicators presented on Chart 03. The authors concluded that the studied enterprise presented a proactive position of sustainable practices because they presented a large number of indicators listed in their core business practices.

Under this perspective, the argument is that companies that integrate socio-environmental aspects beyond the demands of rules and legislations in the operation of their activities are classified as having a proactive behavior in the insertion of sustainability in their practices and strategies. This behavior was adopted, and as time went by, it started to influence these companies' inter-organizational environment, englobing the members of their supply chains. According to Seuring *et al.* Gold (2013), the effective introduction of sustainability demands actions that extrapolate the organizational limits, beyond the inter-organizational environment. In general, the company that manages the chain is the one responsible for the results of the group's actions and operations, which goes above the company's organizational borders. On the other hand, the first movement towards the introduction of sustainability in the supply chain does not always come from the focal business (Silvestre, 2016).

In order to a company to contribute effectively to sustainable development, it is necessary to create and introduce sustainable practices voluntarily, both internal and external to the company's walls, involving all the links that are connected to the enterprise. Buysse *et al.* Verbeke (2003) affirm that the company that expands its relationships to work together with its stakeholders can generate proactive solutions for the social-environmental demands. Companies that

are more proactive in adopting sustainability in their operations are more susceptible to develop adequate responses to answer socio-environmental challenges, by considering the inter-business articulation in the strategy and in the decision-making process of the supply chain (Sharfman *et al.*, 2009). Under this circumstance, it is understood that the adoption of sustainable practices from the whole chain can be motivated by the individual proactive positioning of companies, once they understand the relevance of their role and the importance of the insertion of sustainability in business, in order to reduce the environmental and social impacts, and to bring benefits to society, to the natural environment, and to the maintenance of the supply chain in the market.

6. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Amid the considerations raised through this theoretical research, it is noted that the proactive behavior of companies in relation to sustainability can be considered as a motivating aspect to sustainability in supply chains, or as mentioned by Pagell *et al.* Wu (2009), of a more sustainable supply chain, when considering that the impacts over the natural environment and over the society will always be present. Leaving behind a "limited" perspective of the field of environmental dimension, and to amplify the searchlight of proactivity into a better alignment to sustainability (while also focusing in social aspects), demonstrates that companies, through their practices and changes in behavior, can minimize their impacts over society and improve their socio-environmental performances.

This study aimed to progress the discussions over environmental proactivity proposing the proactivity of sustainable practices, from the proposition of indicators more aligned to the context of sustainability. Such proposition was presented in the last topic of the discussion, in which it was clear that the contribution of businesses have – many times, in relationship with their stakeholders – in the search for sustainability. With that in mind, it is possible to perceive sustainability was inserted in the business spectrum, as seen by the indicators selected, being considered as a necessary condition to the daily operations of the companies. Therefore, it is important that the socio-environmental issues continue to be integrated to the businesses, to the policies, to the strategies, to the decision-making processes, to the positioning, to the routines, and to the daily life of the enterprises.

It is seen that the limitation of the present discussion the field of proactivity and the proposition of a set of indicators in a theoretical perspective, which means, without an empirical validation for this moment. Then, for an empirical observation, it is suggested the necessity to weight between the indicators considered here, through attributing different



Chart 03. Indicators of proactivity of sustainable practices

Dimension	Indicator
Environmental	Explicit definition of environmental policy
	Clear objectives, well-defined responsibilities, and long-term environmental plans
	Evaluation of environmental risks/aspects
	System of measurement and evaluation of environmental performance
	Environmental auditing performed periodically
	Program of environmental emergency call and support
	Employees dedicated to environmental management in full time
	Substitution of pollutants and dangerous materials in products and processes
	Systems for pollution treatment and control
	Systems of recuperation and recycling of materials used in all operations of the company
	Planning and control of production with attention to the reduction of waste and reuse of materials
	Analysis of products lifecycle
	Project of products focusing on dismantling, reusing, and recycling
	Project of products focusing on reduction of consumption of natural resources, energy consumption, and generation of waste
	Use of recycled or reused packaging
	Remediation of environmental passives
	Reduction of emission of gases dangerous to health
	Reusing water system
	Responsible disposal of solid and recyclable waste
	Reduction of consumption of natural resources, energy consumption, and generation of waste in all operations of the company
Environmental criteria to select suppliers	
Environmental criteria to evaluate suppliers	
Social	Explicit definition of the social policy
	Clear objectives, well-defined responsibilities, and long-term social plans
	Evaluation of the social risks/aspects
	Systems of measurement and evaluation of social performance
	Social auditing performed periodically
	Health and safety auditing performed periodically
	Program of social emergency call and support
	Employees dedicated to social projects in full-time
	Participation of the employees in the decisions of the company
	Program of work health and safety
	Incentives to capacitation of employees in courses and training sessions
	Respect to the workload of employees according to present labor laws
	Remuneration of employees coherent and adequate to the function
	Participation of employees in company's profit
	Career plans adequate to each position
	Remediation of social passives
Social criteria to select suppliers	
Social criteria to evaluate suppliers	
Environmental, Social and Economic	Periodic elaboration of sustainability reports
	Training programs for managers and employees about sustainability
	Use of arguments about sustainability in the communication with the general public
	Regular volunteer information about sustainability for clients, governmental agencies, and non-governmental organizations
	Periodic publication of sustainability reports
Continuous collaboration with organizations, events, and projects related to sustainability	

Source: Designed from González-Benito; González-Benito (2005); Abreu *et al.* (2011); SA 8000 (1997); NBR 16000 (2004); and ISO 26000 (2010)



values, as well as a nomological validity for the alignment between the variables, in the construction of indicators of proactivity under sustainable practices that are either generic or adequate to specific economic segments. Hence, it is necessary a deeper theoretical understanding regarding the presented indicators, as well as the statistical validation from an operational view. Based on these considerations, it is seen that the present study demonstrates a positive contribution, once it is able to demonstrate the path for sustainability studies in organizations and in their supply chains, if the approach of the research is the proactive behavior.

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