Characteristics of Leaders and CSR in SMEs

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Abstract:- Social responsibility in Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) is still little studied. The leader plays a major role in defining the managerial strategy. Therefore, the study of its behaviors can improve understanding in the practice of CSR. For this, research was carried out on the basis of a case study through an interview and cognitive mapping with a manager of a company of 18 people, located in Ouagadougou. The results obtained show the strong presence of the affective component in the panorama of responsible behaviors.

Keywords:- Social Responsibility; SME; Manager.

I. INTRODUCTION

The impact of human activity on societies and the environment is becoming more and more visible, which requires companies in different countries to implement sustainable development (SD) policies, regardless of their size. SD translates at the corporate level into managerial practices commonly grouped under the term corporate social responsibility (CSR). This refers to the integration in companies of economic, social and environmental management models to ensure their sustainability [1]. Most work on CSR applies to large structures that are more homogeneous and easier to identify, formalized practices and visible communication [2]. However, all companies – including SMEs must be affected by these new challenges. As early as [3]. deplored the scarcity of research on CSR in SMEs and insisted on the need not to neglect these essential investigations, given the important place of entities in the economy. Even if the leaders of SMEs do not always have a very clear vision of what CSR is, and if their civic convictions often play a decisive role in the sustainable orientation of managerial practices [4], some subscribe to the idea that good ethics is good business [5].

CSR is defined at the corporate level as the application of sustainable development values [6]. This is based on the search for a balance between social, economic and environmental objectives by reconciling them when possible or by proceeding to arbitration [7]. The strong personalization of managerial decisions around the central figure of the manager in SMEs [8,9] has often led researchers who study how SMEs approach the issue of SD to focus their work on the role of the entrepreneur. They show, first, that this role is dominant in the organization's commitment to CSR policies [10,11]. Secondly, they reveal a great heterogeneity of attitudes and behaviors [12,13,14,15].

The study of CSR in SMEs therefore refers to the very strong presence of managers linked to their organization in an almost fusional way. The manager is both the one who runs the business and the provider of capital [16,17]. It is facing itself [18,19] and this modifies the logics of governance. And when shareholders exist, they often belong to the family sphere or emotionally close to the managers [20,21] and have little influence on the company's objectives. The company's objectives and the manager's objectives will often be confused, which gives the manager, sole master on board, a strong potential influence on strategic actions [22,23,24]. Entrepreneurial theory admits that the personality of the leaders, their beliefs and their personal orientations, as well as their perceptions of the environment will determine decision-making [25]. The personal and professional spheres intertwine and the vision of the leaders will be influenced by logics of commitment but also by the strong symbiosis existing between the companies and their manager.

The purpose of this research is thus to contribute to fill the lack of knowledge relating to the influence of the leader on the commitment of his company in a logic of CSR [26]. More specifically, it seeks to better understand the "why" by identifying personal elements that are associated with the important approaches to CSR found in the literature, namely economic, social and environmental reasons. The qualitative approach makes it possible to better answer this research question.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The European Commission, in its 3rd Communication on CSR defines CSR as the responsibility of companies vis-à-vis the effects they have on society. CSR is also defined as the responsibility of an organization vis-à-vis the impacts of its decisions and activities on society and the environment, resulting in ethical and transparent behavior according to the ISO2600 standard. CSR is the managerial translation of SD [27,28]. Indeed, CSR is an integral part of this concept and can be understood as the contribution of companies to SD and involves a triple performance: environmental, social and economic. Déjean and Gond [29] distinguish between institutional and theoretical definitions of CSR. Most of the definitions developed in the institutional sphere give a central place to the company's commitment by specifying that this commitment must go beyond legal obligations and expectations. Organizations and institutions define CSR according to the most important stakeholders for them, according to their nature and their sector of activity or their degree of internationalization. Academic definitions of the concept are distinguished by their desire to provide a general analytical framework independent of the objectives specific to a given organization [29]. In general, these definitions

insist on the fact that it covers dimensions that go beyond the purely economic or legal aspects of the company's activity.

Previous work on CSR, which focused on the profiles of SME managers, highlighted the effects, on their attitudes or behaviors, of a set of individual characteristics linked on the one hand to demographic aspects, such as gender, age, training and experience in management, and on the other hand to personal and entrepreneurial values. It is interesting to note that, to our knowledge, none of these writings connects the manager's personal values to the representations he may have of the existing relationships between the different dimensions of SD embodied in CSR strategies and practices. To develop our arguments, we therefore relied on more general studies on attitudes or behaviors in terms of CSR, assuming that the individual factors identified as discriminating could explain the differences in representations of CSR, on which the studies are based. decisions.

A. Manager values

The proximity management that prevails in SMEs means that the manager can transmit his values through his managerial choices. The company's success and its own success are linked and visible [30]. Several studies on the ethics of the leader have concluded that the adoption of sustainable development practices by SMEs cannot be done without aligning their values and beliefs with those of SD [31,32,33]. The way in which leaders "perceive themselves, think and undergo" will influence the strategic direction of the company [34, p.479]. The leader is therefore the catalyst of the values and culture of the organization [35,36]. Thus when, through personal ethics, he is sensitive to SD issues (which can, for example, in the private sphere, orient his purchasing decisions towards "virtuous" companies, encourage him to militate, to make donations for supporting non-governmental organizations), it is hard to imagine that he could simultaneously consider, in the professional sphere, that SD is incompatible with the economic, social and environmental interests of companies.

However, these individual values also need a social basis in the sense that the leader will only develop them if they are recognized and valued by the community. The quality of the informal relations he maintains within his community is linked to his reputation as well as that of the company and is an incentive to act in a way perceived as honest and honest [37]. This anchoring often underpins its sense of responsibility in relation to its internal and external stakeholders, hence the importance given to the well-being of employees as well as to the image of the company. Ethics can thus be perceived as a means of improving this image [38], economic performance then being associated with the ethical performance of the company and its manager [39]. It is designed as the lubricant of the global relationship system of the firm bringing increased efficiency which contributes to its economic performance, hence the importance of its anchoring in a given environment.

Behaviors are declined according to the principles of SD. Social behavior refers to the search for effectiveness, i.e. the perceived satisfaction of the greatest number. Friedlander and [40] speak of satisfaction of the needs of internal and external actors in their relationship with the organization, a major

interest seeming to reside in the degree of interdependence of the satisfaction of the different parties. The authors insist on the need to integrate the search for different sources of satisfaction into management, even if it always seems difficult to satisfy everyone. In SMEs, the effects of magnification and proximity [41] reinforce the importance of effectiveness. The motivations are moving away from a liberal model towards a more dialectical model [42]. In this perspective, effectiveness will often take on a dimension as important as economic effectiveness or efficiency in the race for performance.

Environmental behaviors are to be linked mainly to legitimacy, dear to many business leaders since it validates the moral right to exercise one's activity (licence to operate), questioning the social utility and the role of companies [43]. Legitimacy, mainly symbolic, would be, according to [44], "a generalized representation according to which the actions of an organization are desirable, just or appropriate within a socially constructed system of norms, values, or beliefs and definitions". However, the social bond needs common values. Most small businesses, often very embedded in their local environment, are particularly sensitive to this. The three legitimacies described by [45] are normative (values and norms), regulatory (rules and controls) and cognitive (shared tacit cultural rules), which refers to the diversity of stakeholders. For Weber, any social action is legitimate if it is justified in the eyes of all. Ecological behaviors belong to this environmental dimension: waste, pollution, water, air and nuisances have the advantage of representing easily identifiable behaviors.

Finally, economic behavior refers to profitability; this can range from the sole search for sustainability (to survive and last) to the quest for maximum profit. Observers of small businesses find that managers rarely put profit maximization before any other goal [46,47,48,49,50]. Profitability also depends on the image and reputation of the company, often favored by actions related to SD.

B. Entrepreneurial values

Entrepreneurial strategies [51] and objectives including growth and sustainability [52,53,54] can also have an impact on SD engagement. Leaders expressing growth intentions are those who most develop a culture of innovation within their company [55]. However, society's enthusiasm for SD creates new opportunities that only entrepreneurial leaders are likely to identify and exploit as a source of differentiation. The propensity of managers to adopt CSR strategies is thus greater in innovative companies which implicitly also target growth [56,57,58,59].

For these leaders, who seek to combine corporate profitability and SD, adherence to the economic argument of CSR based on reputation, access to markets and financial returns [60,61] can be appealing. A study carried out among SMEs in New Zealand shows that two-thirds of managers surveyed identify cost reduction and positive financial benefits as the main motivations for their implementation of environmental practices [62].

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The qualitative approach using case study was used to achieve the objectives of this research insofar as we analyze the behaviors of leaders which may seem delicate and requires precise and rigorous tools. The case study, according to [63] is an exploratory research method which consists of obtaining exhaustive information about a situation, an individual or a

group of exceptional individuals. It always makes it possible to establish an overall portrait of their situation, their particular problems or their opinions. The use of adapted tools makes it possible to go beyond the discourse, on sensitive subjects affecting the image of the individual. The methods used for diagnosis and cognitive mapping are particularly suitable for studying social responsibility in SMEs; they avoid locking themselves into a conceptualization determined a priori [64].

The study was carried out with the manager of an SME of 18 employees based in Ouagadougou, which operates in the production of corn flour. It was created in 2015. The manager is 43 years old and has a bachelor's degree in agribusiness with several certifying training courses in the field. The research was based on semi-structured face-to-face interviews to try to better understand the behavior of the leader in the context of responsible management. A first interview lasting two hours and thirty minutes was conducted using an approach close to the life story. Freedom is almost total and the leader begins by telling his story. The theme of research is not mentioned, the manager being just invited to talk about his company. However, an interview guide had been prepared in order to complete the questions not answered spontaneously and to allow unexpressed ideas to be brought out through specifically formulated questions.

A second two-hour interview gave rise to the construction of a cognitive map, which has already proven its usefulness in the context of studies in SMEs [65]. "A cognitive map is a graphic representation of the mental representation that the researcher has of a set of discursive representations stated by a subject from his own cognitive representations, about a particular object" [66]. The map was constructed using grids to be filled in on the model of Cossette [67] based on questions on the values of the leader in the exercise of his activity.

The study is completed by an understanding of the environment, the workplace and the general context in which the manager operates. The protocol applied respects the principle of triangulation recommended in the context of a qualitative case study [68] with the use of original and specific but also complementary tools. The dynamic and interactive approach proposed through the interview makes it possible to maintain a logic of investigation similar to that of cognitive maps. The respective contributions of each of these two methods can differ and enrich each other and better shed light on the object studied. If "drawing cognitive maps only offers a static vision of the representation without saying anything about its genesis and its functioning" [69], it remains plausible that the interview will fill these gaps.

The analysis of the data obtained began at the start of the interview through a precise reading grid developed for this purpose. The multitude of data collected requires a reading grid to account for the complexity [70]. The grid was developed on the basis of the behavioral principles of the manager in his responsible management practice within his organization. These are the principles of engagement in CSR according to these personal values.

IV. RESULTS

The case of the SME studied in this research shows an important place of the manager in the strategic choices and decision-making of the company. The manager of the SME shares the fundamental values of the company in

"enthusiasm" and "complicity" with the various employees. The structure is flexible and the manager is often operational and shares this knowledge and experience with all the staff. The manager began his passion activity in 2015 just after obtaining his bachelor's degree and having completed two years of internships and employment in a large food-based company. Employees have a seniority that varies from one to seven years. The data collected during the interviews will be able to decline the axes of interest to the research, namely the identification of responsible behavior through the values of the leader.

Manager behaviors in this study are classified according to the SD triptych model. The aim is to identify behaviors specifically linked to economic strategies, those attributed to respect for employees and those associated with ecological or societal considerations. Most of these behaviors go beyond compliance with applicable laws. The societal aspect is rarely mentioned, which corroborates the conclusions of Dupuis, Haned and Le Bas [71]. Next, ecological behaviors are easier to identify and more developed than behaviors in the social domain. They have a more technical content and the benchmark of good practices is quite clear [72] even if there are trade-offs to be made. Moreover, in general, it is these behaviors related to the environment that are put forward by the managers of SMEs to justify their social responsibility [72]. The social behaviors approach involves more ideological considerations. What is it to be "humanly responsible"? The values are more varied and more diffuse and the trade-offs much more difficult. For example, employability generally belongs to the register of socially responsible actions. However, making its employees employable for an SME can jeopardize the entire structure in the event of departure of the best elements, tempted by better working conditions or greater autonomy.

Also, some of the responsible behaviors linked to the convictions of the leaders are also profitable for the company: respect for plants and rhythms which makes it possible to obtain a more satisfactory result for customers, the use of organic fertilizers, the systems of irrigation but also the various attentions paid to the team. The notions of respect for work, nature or people, on the one hand, and economic benefits, on the other, are intertwined. But for a slight additional cost, it is plausible that the leader will choose ecology or human relations, out of conviction. Finally, economic behavior seems to constitute a means and not an end. The actions are carried out either by the feeling of being invested with a responsibility, or by pleasure (of the quality, of the work, of the relationship). Personal satisfaction appears as the first expected performance.

It should be noted that the link between the beliefs and behaviors of leaders appears implicitly in this research. It is, for example, because the manager asserts himself as "reasonable", "not a gambler" "by nature", that the accounts remain rigorous and the cash flow stable. The importance given to the friendship developed with the partner or to teamwork allows for better organization and better social relations. The trust and authenticity sought helps to establish good relationships with business partners, ecological beliefs improve environmental behaviors…

V. DISCUSSION

The objective of the study was to identify the personal values that underlie the adherence of the SME manager in his

commitment to CSR. The various investigations show that the search for profit is not an end in itself but only a means to serve the deeper aspirations of leaders. This does not mean that the leader is not aware of the importance of good financial health, quite the contrary, which shows his responsibility in the field.

This first remark on profit is integrated into research on the goals of managers [73]. It is clear that the leader is more in the context of sustainability and autonomy than in the situation of growth and autonomy. Again, his beliefs, convictions and expectations do not commit him to dreaming of a business destined to grow or to bring in especially money. From this, everything that will come in opposition to deep convictions risks not working. The development of social responsibility in SMEs is possible if it makes it possible to stay in tune with beliefs. These bring both responsible behaviors, whether profitable or not, and non-responsible behaviors.

If, for example, beliefs and leaders are not in line with responsible behavior, it will be a matter of being much more convincing as to the "return on investment" of CSR. Actions pursuing the improvement of social responsibility will not be able to avoid taking into consideration the pivotal and determining role of psycho-sociological factors. The movement is reversed, from the "calculation, norms, imperatives" components towards the affective components. What actions are best placed to succeed in influencing the representations of managers? Actions related to economic beliefs such as incentives or opportunities, actions related to possibilities of control such as laws or aid, or finally actions, or action on the local environment?

Support, awareness-raising or training can also serve as a lever for modifying the representations of managers. However, these measures cannot do without in-depth investigation, knowledge of the environment in which they operate and the expectations of the officials concerned.

VI. CONCLUSION

CSR is the company's response to its actions on society and the environment following the damage caused during its production process. Today, the practice of CSR in SMEs depends on the particularity of the manager. The objective of this research was to contribute to a better knowledge of the representations that their managers have of the managerial issues of CSR. Starting from the observation that the utilitarian conception of CSR had gradually become dominant, from the 1970s, in large companies and in governmental and academic circles, it seemed useful to better understand the sensitivity of SME managers to the economic, social and which are strongly mobilized to encourage managers to design and implement CSR strategies [74].

The results allow us to say that the manager's values explain the adherence of an SME to CSR. Similarly, the entrepreneurial objectives (search for growth, search for long-term sustainability with a view to transmission) and the deliberate nature of the strategy have little or no explanatory power, contrary to ethics or beliefs. individual. Ultimately, it is the citizen leader, and not the manager leader, who sees in the implementation of CSR policies positive economic, social and environmental benefits for the company.

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