

The Management Practices of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises in the Economic Crisis Context: A Literature Review and Empirical Study

SMAALI Siham and ELABBADI Bouchra

Abstract—The economic and financial crisis of 2008 is considered as the most important crisis that the world has known since 1929 (Reinhart & Rogoff (2009)). This crisis of global dimension has not been temporary. It is lasting and has not only affected the financial markets and the economies but has also touched the modes and managerial practices of the organizations. In a period of crisis, companies must decide and manage in the emergency. The methods and tools commonly used are sometimes considered outdated or even inadequate.

This research aims to highlight the different managerial practices and strategies adopted to strengthen the resilience and to ensure the survival of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) towards the economic crisis.

Our work consists in answering our main questioning namely:

What are the managerial practices implemented by the SMEs allowing them to face the effects of the economic crisis?

In order to respond to this question, and after a thorough literature review, we conducted an empirical exploratory study of qualitative type through semi-structured interviews with a sample of ten leaders of Moroccan SMEs. Those companies, located in the city of Tangier, have all of them been impacted by the economic crisis and have managed to face it, to adapt to it or even to benefit from it. The interviews carried out with the managers allowed the exploration of managerial practices specificities in the crisis context. They have highlighted the different strategies adopted, the mechanisms of coordination, communication and information systems privileged in a time of crisis. They also provided insights on the role of specific practices as the improvisation, the innovation and organizational learning in the strengthening of the SMEs resilience. In addition, they have opened interesting tracks to investigate about resources and skills crucial to the survival of the SMEs towards the crisis.

Keywords— Economic crisis context, Management practices, strategic choices, resources and skills, resilience, small and medium-sized enterprise (SMEs).

SMAALI Siham¹ Abdelmalek Essaadi University, ENCG of Tangier-Morocco (e-mail: smaalisiham@hotmail.com)

ELABBADI Bouchra², Abdelmalek Essaadi University, ENCG of Tangier-Morocco (e-mail: elabbadib@yahoo.fr).

I. INTRODUCTION

Triggered by the episode of the subprimes, the economic and financial crisis of 2008 is the longest and most severe observed since 1929. The conduct of the 2008 crisis is indicative of a systemic crisis: a particular phenomenon -the distribution of credits to low-income households- has led to chain reactions in the whole of the financial system which are then disseminated to the real economy¹.

This crisis has not been temporary. It is still lasting and it has not only affected the financial markets and the economies but has also touched the modes and managerial practices of the organizations.

In a period of crisis, companies must decide and manage in the emergency. The methods and tools used are considered sometimes outdated and even inadequate in a crisis context.² As for the Moroccan companies, there is no doubt that these have not escaped the reversal of the situation at the international level as a direct consequence of this crisis. These companies and in particular, those oriented toward exports, have suffered from the decline in orders, tightening of the production and by way of consequence, the decline in the growth that they generate.

How was this crisis experienced by companies and how did they face it?

There are so many questions that arise with acuteness and whose main elements of a response can be obtained only from the companies themselves that have suffered from the effects of the crisis on a daily basis. Knowing perfectly that the majority of the companies constituting the essential of the Moroccan industry are medium or small in size, this research focuses on the managerial practices and strategies adopted by the SMEs to cope up with the effects of the economic crisis. We also note that the survival of the SME in a context of crisis is at stake, because generally this business is less well protected than a large company (Torrès, 1999).

In fact, the large company may distribute the losses of some of its activities on others that remained profitable,

¹ Isabelle Waquet and Nicolas Thibault "Les crises financières sont-elles une fatalité?", Idées économiques et sociales 2013/4 - N° 174, pp 4 -5.

² Maurice Thévenet, "Manager en temps de crise", Eyrolles Group, Organisations Edition, 2009.

whereas the SME, generally located in a range of specialization, may not persist durably in the deficit.³ On the other hand, these companies are characterized by a remarkable capacity of resistance which differentiates them from large ones. This capacity is explained by a relevant and quick adaptation and flexibility in front of changes of the environment thanks to lower rigidity, high specialization and proximity to markets (Torrès, 1999). Finally, in a period of instability, the SME is forced to rethink and to reconsider its conduct and practices. It must mobilize appropriate strategies and take important and quick decisions while basing itself on the little information as well as on the limited resources within its reach, in order to ensure its survival. It is in this perspective that our main object of research, aims to highlight the different managerial practices and strategies adopted to strengthen the resilience of SMEs towards the economic crisis and particularly Moroccan SME located in the city of Tangier. The interest of our research is not simply practical, but also answers the current questions of the scientific community towards the management in a context of economic crisis on one side, as well as towards SME as a field of research, on the other side. Also, St-Pierre and Fourcade (2009) specify that the SMEs, by their singular behavior, constitute favorable field to scientific research.

The main questioning which directs our research and to which this study plans to answer is the following one:

What are the managerial practices implemented by small and medium-sized enterprises allowing them to cope with the effects of the economic crisis?

Our main questioning is declined in a set of derived questionings:

- What is the leader's perception on the economic crisis?
- What are the strategic choices and the specific managerial practices which strengthen the SMEs resilience in front of the crisis?
- What are the resources and the essential skills mobilized in the context of the economic crisis?

In order to respond to these questions, and after a thorough literature review, we conducted an empirical exploratory study of qualitative type through semi-structured interviews with a sample of ten leaders of Moroccan SMEs. Those companies, located in the city of Tangier, have all of them been impacted by the economic crisis and have managed to face it, to adapt to it or even to benefit from it.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. *The Management in a Context of Economic Crisis*

The context of the crisis combined with other factors in the environment (the explosion of information technologies and communication, globalization and increased competition) is considered as a complex situation, requiring the passage from

a classic management towards a management adapted to the complexity of the environment and organizations.⁴

These last are considered now as complex systems covering, according to Jean-Louis Le Moigne, a meaning more evolved than the one developed by the founders of the systemic approach (Norbert Wiener, 1945 and Ludwig Von Bertalanffy, 1968).⁵

Through our literature review and according to the authors, we notice that the management in the crisis context covers specific practices and mobilizes theoretical currents and concepts adapted to this context (Roux-Dufort, 2003; Liabert, 2005; Lalonde, 2004; Grewal and Tansuhaj, 2001; Weick, 1993). Among the main conceptual and theoretical contributions mobilized in our research that aim to understand the managerial practices of SMEs in time of crisis, there is:

The Theory of Sense-Making Developed by K.E. Weick

It defines the factors of creation of meaning between the actors in a situation of crisis and their activation process and explains how the construction of meaning contributes to organizations resilience towards the crisis.⁶ The work of the American psycho-sociologist Karl Emmanuel Weick on the explanation of the disasters and the collapse of coordination systems have been grouped under the label of sense-making.

Weick, through the study of the accident of Mann Gulch during which fire fighters died, shows that:

-The organizations may be faced with new situations, not considered previously.

-The routines and the habits aren't then of any help and the only way out lies in the capacity to interact between the people to find a new solution, at the risk of disappearing.

It is an invitation not to reinforce its routines but to make them evolve when they do not provide a solution.

The Improvisation as a Response to the Crisis and its Role in the Construction of Meaning

The improvisation is characterized by a time limit extremely reduced between the decision and the action to such a point that the decision seems to be taken as the action is already in progress (Moorman, Miner, 1998).

It involves cognitive processes of recombination of the routines and the know-how. The improvisation may be conceptualized as a process of response to crisis.⁷ It consists then in a collective action designed to respond to a temporal pressure and a strong environmental complexity (Crossan and al., 2005). A capacity of improvisation is added to the concept of the organizational competence by the fact that it is required in a turbulent context. The improvisation is a skill of first need to ensure the survival. It is necessary when the procedures are not adapted in the crisis context (Weick, 1993).

⁴Dominique GENELOT, "Manager dans la complexité: Réflexions à l'usage des dirigeants", INSEP Consulting Editions, 4th Edition, 2014.

⁵Ibid.

⁶K.E. Weick, "The Collapse of Sense-Making in Organizations: The Mann Gulch Disaster", Administrative Science Quarterly, n° 38, décembre 1993, p. 628-653.

⁷Edmond PASSE, Crise et improvisation : Les leçons de quatre études de cas, M.S.Thesis, Strasbourg University 2011.

³Olivier TORRES, "The Small and Medium-sized enterprises", Dominos-Flammarion Editions.

The Organizational learning and its Role in Strengthening the Companies' Resilience

This resilience that is a function of several factors including anticipation, resistance, adaptation and re-establishment, is reinforced by the lessons of the past and by the organizational learning. We notice that some authors add that the experience of the crisis would in turn enhance the organizational learning (Valikangas and Merlyn, 2005; Hamel and Prahalad, 1990; Koenig, 1994).

Besides, many authors recognize the importance of the learning approach in periods of transformation or uncertainty (Probst and Büchel, 1995). These periods, which can be considered as a positive opportunity enabling the progress of the company, refer us to the concept of the dynamic capability that allows to give meaning to threats (Eisenhardt and Martin, 2000). The organizational learning is one of the aspects of this ability that allows to develop new resources able to ensure the survival of the company (Hamel and Prahalad, 1990; Teece, 1997).

The Role of the Perception of the Crisis by the Leader

The crisis is a concept strongly linked to its perception by the actors, including the leaders who are considered as determinant elements in the management of crisis (Bolzinger, 1982; Braguier, 1993; Elenkov, 1997; Liabert, 2005; Lagadec, 1991).

The strategic behaviour of the company, in a climate of instability, depends fundamentally according to Braguier (1993), on the perception of the environment's hostility by the manager. According to Morin (1994), the ability to lead a crisis situation depends on a very large extent of what has been put in place before its occurrence. In the same context, Lagadec (2001) stresses the importance of encouraging the effort of anticipation.

The Strategies Developed in Time of Crisis

According to Peters and Waterman (2012), the organizations permanently concerned by the adaptations and innovations will be those that will respond more quickly to changes and thus those who will survive.

Hall (1980) reminds us that the greatest success is possible, even in a very hostile environment. Similarly, he suggests that companies can successfully combine several generic strategies. However, only will keep a position of strength on the market the companies taking seriously into account the expectations and needs of their customers, because the consumer prefers to bet on safe values that even guarantee him a real value added, particularly in a period of crisis.⁸Starbuck, Greve and Hedberg (1978), in order to reconnect with the performance in the context of economic crisis, recommend the following actions: a reorientation of investment in marketing, as well as the differentiation product-market in terms of quality and price.

⁸ Franck DUQUESNOIS, "Les stratégies des petites entreprises dans les industries en crise", Thesis presented to obtain the degree of Doctor of Montpellier I University presented and supported publicly on December 13, 2011.

According to Hall (1980), firms that have survived the crisis are those who have sought to obtain:

- The lowest factory price (while having an acceptable quality);
- The best relation product/service/quality (while having acceptable prices).

The Approach by the Resources and Skills

The literature review has led us to propose that the resilience of an organization and its capacity to cope with the crisis is linked to its capacity to plan and deploy the resources and skills that it holds.⁹

These resources and skills can constitute a source of competitiveness for the company (Penrose, 1995; Wernerfelt, 1984; Koenig, 1996; Kamoun-Chouk, 2009).

B. The Specificities of SMEs Management in the Economic Crisis Context

According to several authors and theorists among which Olivier Torres, Julien and Marchesnay, SME have certain specific characteristics that differentiate their management of the large companies.

Among the most fruitful theoretical explanations, there is the effect of magnification mentioned by H. Mahe De Boislandelle. According to this author, the problems do not arise with the same intensity in large companies and SME. This effect of magnification is characterized by multiple effects grouped in three categories: The Butterfly Effect (a minor problem can cause major difficulties within the SMEs), the Microcosm effect (the focus on the short term and the proximity) and the egotrophic effect (a strong centralization of management decisions and a concentration of power in the hands of the manager).¹⁰

Besides the specificities mentioned above, the SME is particular by a proximity management characterized by:

- A reduced number of hierarchical levels
- A customization in the management and in the relationship with the external partners,
- An interweaving of functions,
- A simplified information and coordination systems, based sometimes on the oral communication and on the mutual adjustment,
- An implicit strategy based largely on the intuition of the manager.¹¹

At the outcome of the literature review, we have noted that SMEs had some organizational and managerial specificities that differentiate their management practices in crisis time. These specificities are synthesized under the proposals below:

⁹Khalife Eliane Boukhalil, "Le Management des PME dans un Contexte de crise : Le cas du Liban", Thesis presented to obtain the degree of Doctor in management science- Paris-Dauphine University presented and supported publicly on novembre 2014.

¹⁰ Henri Mahé De Boislandelle, "GRH en PME: universalité et contingences: essai de théorisation", Revue internationale P.M.E :économie et gestion de la petite et moyenne entreprise, vol. 11, n°2-3, 1998, p. 11-30.

¹¹Olivier TORRES, "The Small and Medium-sized enterprises", Dominos-Flammarion Editions.

In a Context of Crisis, the leader is one of Fundamental Resources for the SME

Hitt, Bierman and al., (2001) find that the leader is an organizational resource for the SME. He is a central actor who feeds other resources and which constitutes a decisive factor for the success or failure of the SME, thus favoring the taking of fast and adequate strategic responses when the environment becomes turbulent (Faber, 2000; Julien, 2005).

In addition, by his central role, the manager favors the reactivity in time of crisis and it is the principal manager of financial, material and social risks, (Julien, 1990; Wtterwulge, 1998).

Some studies show that the positive behavior of the manager leads to a better organizational performance and tends to mobilize employees more in time of crisis (Aveyand al., 2011; Steyrerand al., 2008).¹²

The Relational Network of the Manager Plays an Important Role in the Survival of the SME

The notion of external proximity makes the leader able to change a part of his environment through his relational network (Saporta, 1997). This proximity provides the company with a knowledge of the environment in a disrupted context (Dollinger, 1985). According to Galaskiewicz and Shatin (1981), the managers have an interest to use their personal relations and their status to form the inter-organizational relations in order to minimize the uncertainty in a turbulent environment.

The interactions on which the networks are based, are sources of values for the SMEs, because they allow the sharing of challenges without having to resort to additional financial investments (Thévenard and Puthod, 2006).

The Innovative Dynamic of the SMEs Strengthens their Capacity of Adaptation to the Crisis

The crisis is a situation which threatens the functioning, the objectives and the values of an organization and which calls up to the formulation of new innovative practices (Milburn and al., 1983; Shrivastava, 1988; Quarantelli, 1988)

In order to ensure a certain sustainability, businesses must not be sufficient to produce good products with good processes, they must innovate (Lorino and Tarondeau, 2006).

The SME constitutes, due to its characteristics, a favorable ground for the development of innovation capacity. In the same lineage, many authors have highlighted the innovative dynamic of small businesses which is most often informal and which is not limited to the research and development (Nooteboom, 2000).

In addition, SMEs have some characteristics in favor of innovation:

-The simple and interactive mechanisms of coordination and information that facilitate the improvisation in times of crisis (Koenig, 1997; Peters and Waterman, 2012);

- The organizational structure of the SME characterized by its flexibility that could constitute a strategic resource for the SME in a context of uncertainty. (El Akremi, 2005).

- The entrepreneurial culture of some SMEs that allows them to face the crisis (Gosselin, 1988; Gasse, 1992; Defrenne and Delvaux, 1990).

The Limited Resources and Skills of SMEs are a Source of Fragility that Leads them to Optimize the Resources Available

Given its weakness in various resources (financial, human and organizational), the SME is more fragile than the large company towards the consequences of crisis (Brouard and Larivet, 2008).

This situation leads the SMEs to enhance the potential of the resources at their disposal, their organizational skills, as well as the internal skill of their managers to generate sustainable competitive advantages and to cope with the crisis (Drummond and Chell, 1994).

The Experimented and Committed Human Resources Constitute an Essential Resource for SMEs in Times of Crisis

Wright and Hobfoll (2004) adopt the definition of the attitudinal involvement as the power of the emotional attachment of employees to an organization or acceptance of the objectives and values of the organization and they consider the organizational involvement as a social resource.

According to them, the emotional attachment or the involvement of the employee for the organization which employs him provides a primary source of social resources in time of crisis.

III. EMPIRICAL STUDY OF SMEs MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN THE CONTEXT OF ECONOMIC CRISIS: CASE OF SMEs OF TANGIER

A. Methodology

We have positioned our research at the level of the interpretative epistemological paradigm.

In our choice of the positioning, we have mainly been guided by the objectives of the present research, namely in a first time, to understand the special features of the management and the managerial practices of SMEs in the context of the economic crisis.

Our research follows a qualitative methodology of exploratory type based on an interpretative analysis. It is a methodology suited to the exploration of the phenomena which aims to collect the subjective experience of individuals and the way in which they make sense.¹³

The qualitative approach attached to it leads to understand a situation through the presentation and analysis of data extracted from the field of study. We resort to a hybrid exploratory approach on multiple study cases based on semi-

¹²Mhenna Nawal, "Impact de la résilience sur l'engagement organisationnel: étude de cas des cadres managers au sein de secteur automobile de la région de Tanger Tétouan", Research group: Management and Audit of organisations, Abdelmalek Essaadi University-ENCG of Tangier.

¹³Thiétart, R. A., collectif, Méthodes de recherche en management. Paris, Dunod, 2007.

structured interviews that allowed us to discuss the results in confronting them with our review of the literature. It is in fact a frequent round trip between the empirical material collected and the theory.

The population that was accessible to us includes the leaders of SMEs located in Tangier and touched by the economic crisis of 2008. The choice of the companies has been made at the level of six sectors of activity that have been impacted by the economic crisis namely the textile and clothing, automobile, building projects, tourism, real estate promotion and private education.

The sampling of targeted SMEs has been carried out in a reasoned manner, non-statistics and based essentially on the judgment. Our sample consists of 10 SMEs which have been impacted by the economic crisis and which have up to today survived in this context or even in some cases exceeded the effects of the crisis and reconnected with the performance.

The interview guide with the managers contains mainly twenty-five questions divided into five themes related to our research questions and also coming from our literature review. Each theme includes a set of questions. The approached themes are:

- The perception of the crisis by the leader;
- The strategies and managerial practices adopted by the SMEs in the context of the crisis;
- The resources and the essential competences mobilized in the context of the crisis;
- The organizational learning in time of crisis.
- The general information relating to the leader and to the company.

B. Presentation and Discussion of the Results

Synthesis of Results

The analysis of the results has been conducted according to the themes addressed at the level of semi-directive interviews, the main results identified are synthesized by theme as follows:

The Perception of the Crisis by the Leaders

The economic crisis affected all the business sectors in which our sample companies operate.

This economic crisis had effects which were translated according to the Managers by:

- A decrease in turnover and result;
- A deterioration of the financial situation of the company and the cash shortage.

We notice that the intensity of the crisis effect on the organizations differs from a SME to another and depends on the sectors of activity among which the real estate promotion followed by the clothing sector have been the most affected. The Managers interviewed were all of them not prepared to the occurrence of this crisis.

As for the perception of the crisis by the Managers, the latter differ as for their perception of the crisis

- The first category (7 out of 10) perceives the crisis as a period of instability, risk and uncertainty.
- The second category of leaders (3 out of 10 managers) have rather a positive perception of the crisis considering it an

opportunity of learning which permits innovation, the search for new solutions and the development of the capacity to adapt to changing situations. These leaders consider at the same time the crisis as a situation involving some risks and uncertainties.

As to the perception of leaders on the attitude of their employees towards the crisis, the latter are divided in two categories:

Half of the leaders noticed a change of behavior of their employees; this change was considered rather positive (support of the manager's decisions, proposal for new solutions, etc...).

The Managers explain the comprehensive and positive attitude of their employees by:

- The reduced staff that facilitates the communication and the membership as well as the high level of education.
- The corporate culture also that plays an important role in the positive attitude of the employees.

Indeed, some Managers view their business as a human enterprise where prevails a culture that reflects the values of the family business.

The second category of Managers noticed no change of attitude of their staff, this category concerns especially the clothing business companies. These explain this situation by:

- The high rate of rotation of the staff.
- The low level of education of the majority of the staff.
- The Maintaining of the pace of activity and the permanent level of the workers' wages;

The Managerial Practices and Strategies Adopted in the Context of the Crisis

Decision Making

The Managers interviewed distinguish three categories of decisions:

-The strategic decisions: for which the Managers favor the consultation and collective decisions. These collective decisions are arranged with the members of the executive committee made up of the persons in charge of the main functions of the company.

For the families companies, strategic decisions are also made in common agreement with the associates of the same family.

-The simple decisions falling within the operational: These decisions are taken at the level of the persons in charge of the different functions of the company through the delegation.

-The urgent decisions: they are very frequent in a period of crisis. These decisions that require a great capacity of improvisation are in great majority taken by the leaders themselves or arranged with the members of their family for the family businesses.

Coordination

In the context of crisis, the majority of the Managers declare that in frequent situations, they prefer an informal coordination and leave aside the procedures opening the field to improvisation.

Through this analysis, we can deduce that in a period of crisis, the informal coordination is favored in comparison to the mechanisms of standardized coordination.

Communication

The majority of the interviewed Managers believe that the communication has become more intense.

The frequency of meetings increases to raise the awareness of the staff on the important decisions and on the changes that will be made (downsizing, voluntary departures, deletion of bonuses, reduction in wages, etc...).

The leaders during this period are closer and listening to the employees, their cooperation with the representatives of the staff becomes more frequent which allows them to avoid social conflicts.

These leaders also use the symbolic in demonstrating exemplary conduct in renouncing benefits which they enjoyed before the crisis (suspension of the distribution of profits, etc).

Strategies

The leaders have developed different strategies to deal with the crisis and some of which have enabled SMEs to emerge from the crisis or even to return to growth.

At the end of the analysis that we have carried out on the perception and the experience of the crisis by the Managers, we have identified three categories of SMEs:

- Those who overtook the crisis and returned to growth (3 SMEs out of 10);
- Those who have not overtaken the crisis yet, but they have manage to adapt to it (6 SMs out of 10);
- Those who still have no visibility and live from day to day (One case).

The analysis of the results has allowed us to note that the Managers belonging to a same category among those cited above adopted strategies that showed several similarities.

- For companies having overcome the effects of the crisis and reconnected with the growth (3 SMEs out of 10): These companies have developed offensive strategies by extending their market or by opening on new markets. Two of them adopted diversification of products and customers segments while maintaining at the same time their basic products.

The Managers of these companies add that a hostile environment sometimes offers excellent opportunities of investment.

- Concerning companies which are not yet out of the crisis but who succeed to adapt (6 out of 10): these have developed defensive and reactive strategies of survival essentially based on a decrease in prices while maintaining the same product and the same level of quality.

Some have even opted for a withdrawal from some markets and a disengagement of the assets.

- The third category consists of an SME which lacks of visibility. This latter adopts an attitude of short term adjustment in the so-called "crisis management" (fire-fighting) according to the changes dictated by the environment.

The strategic choices adopted by these three categories of companies can be explained by the economic and financial health of the companies as well as by the personal inclinations

of the leaders and their profiles (their taste for the risk, etc...), the degree of their information about the environment and their perception of the crisis. In fact among the SMEs who have achieved performance, there were those whose leaders perceive the crisis as an opportunity.

The different strategies adopted by companies in response to the crisis come in a set of measures taken by the Managers at the level of the different functions of the company (Finance-Human resources-Commercial- procurement, etc...).

The table below summarizes the manager perception of the crisis, the different strategies and managerial practices developed in the crisis context.

TABLE I:
PERCEPTION OF THE CRISIS BY THE LEADERS, STRATEGIES AND MANAGERIAL PRACTICES ADOPTED IN CRISIS CONTEXT

	SMEs having overtaken the crisis and returned to growth	SMEs not having overtaken the crisis yet but which manage to adapt to it
Perception of the crisis by the leaders	- Opportunity and risk	-Risk and incertaincy
Role of the leader	-Permanent presence -Involvement -Leadership	-Permanent presence -Involvement
Strategies	-Offensive strategies: -Market extension -Diversification strategies through products and Markets	-Defensive and reactive strategies through price reduction
Mechanisms of coordination	-Simplified and informal	
Decision making	-Strategic decisions: collegiate - Urgent decisions: In majority unilateral taken by the leader and based on the improvisation	
Finance	-Resort to bank financing -Financing by own funds -Non-distribution of profits and their reinjection into the company -Control of expenses by the decrease of certain charges -Strengthening of recovery actions -Rigorous budget management	-Strict management of cash -Strengthening of recovery actions. -Renegotiation of banking conditions. -Control of expenses by the decrease of certain charges -Financing by own funds -Non-distribution of profits. -Rigorous budget management
Investment	-Achievement of new investments	-Maintenance of ongoing investments -Stop of new investments -Disinvestment actions: Closure of Establishments, etc...

Commercial	-Aggressive actions -Use of intermediate agents -Strengthening of the relational network -Improvement of delivery deadline - Maintaining of sale prices -Maintaining of terms of payment	-Strengthening of the relational network -Improvement of delivery deadline - Decrease of sale prices -Maintaining of terms of payment
Procurement	-Sourcing improvement -The change of some suppliers by cheaper ones. - Optimization of logistics costs by reviewing logistics circuits and renegotiating transport costs with logistics providers. -reduction of stocks	
Human resources	-Recruitment (Some companies encounter difficulties in recruiting sharp profiles) -No dismissal -Training actions	-Stop of recruitment -Cut in staff in certain sectors outside the clothing sector, which has a high turnover rate -The versatility of human resources is seen as a priority -Stop of the training -suspension of bonuses -reduction of wages for some companies
Innovation	Product and process oriented innovation	Process oriented innovation
Production	-Adaptation of the production rate to the volume of orders -Maintaining or improving the quality level of the product	

The Resources and Skills needed in a Crisis Context

Resources

All the Managers agree on the fact that the human element experienced and with a certain know-how represents the main resource of their business in a period of crisis. Through the interviews carried out, we can observe in the answers that the leaders themselves constitute an essential resource for these SMEs. The centrality of the role of the leader in the SME makes his influence on employees significant. Through this role, the Manager remains the cornerstone of the strengthening of the creativity of his employees, their stimulation and the creation of the synergy with them. The Manager, a central actor within the SMEs, often accumulates several functions and does not miss to take advantage and to evolve his performance in times of crisis. His relational network based on relations of trust is a true resource for the company in times of crisis.

In addition, the Managers are almost unanimous on the fact that the permanent and old staff, through the experience and the know-how that it has capitalized, is a scarce resource for SMEs. Among the resources of great importance in time of crisis, the leaders have cited the reputation of their company and its brand image.

The non-transferable know-how and patents are also key resources for SMEs. Finally, financial resources are also

considered as important in times of crisis and affect the strategic choices made by these SMEs. In fact, the SMEs having opted for growth and diversification have a solid financial foundation.

Skills

Among the essential skills needed in a time of crisis cited by the majority of the leaders, and among which there is the intuition, the improvisation, the flexibility, versatility and the leadership, we retain that the capacity of improvisation is the most cited by the managers.

The Organizational learning

All the leaders without exception have reported that they had learned a lot during this period of crisis. They add that their companies have acquired experience and know-how which enable them to cope with the possible occurrence of another crisis. In addition, some leaders believe that the crisis has allowed them to learn to reorganize, and to adapt to changing situations.

Results Discussion

This last chapter that pursues the objective to deepen the reflection on the contributions of this research, presents a synthesis of the discussion of the results of the empirical study in relation with the scientific literature. It puts in perspective the theoretical contributions and allows to establish bridges between the results emerged from the ground and the contributions of the authors.

The findings of our analysis of the empirical results and their overlap with the theory can be summarized as follows:

The Perception of the Crisis by the Leaders Influences their Strategic Choices

Some Managers view the crisis as an opportunity and develop offensive strategies of growth and diversification. Others consider the crisis as a threat and develop adaptive strategies of survival based essentially on a prices drop. These strategic choices also depend on the financial capacities of the company, the profile of the Manager, its perception of the environment and finally of his taste of the risk. These strategies have been declined in a set of measures undertaken at the level of all the company functions (Finance-Human Resources-commercial-procurement -Investment- research and development. The strategies of responses developed by SMEs as well as the actions undertaken have allowed these latter: To overtake the effects of the crisis and to return to growth: it is about the SMEs which have adopted offensive strategies for growth and diversification;

- To adapt to the situation by ensuring continuity and survival: it is about the enterprises having adopted defensive and adaptive strategies of survival based on the decrease of prices. The whole of the results generated are confirmed by the literature. In fact, Smart and Vertinski (1984) suggest that the propensity of a Manager to adopt a particular strategic position would depend on his own perception regarding the capability of the company to control its environment. Schreuder and al.(1991) show that the most performing strategies prove to be

those which consist in changing the product mix and the targets. The least efficient are those which are focused only on the reduction of costs.

The Resources Considered Essential for SMEs in times of Crisis are

1. The leader and his relational network that play a fundamental role in the crisis management.

This finding is reinforced by some authors (Aveyand al., 2011; Steyrer and al., 2008) who concluded that the Manager is an organizational resource for the SME. He is a central actor who feeds other resources and who constitutes a decisive factor for the success or the failure of the SMEs, thus favoring the taking of fast and adequate strategic responses when the environment becomes turbulent. In addition, (Puthod and Thévenard, 2006; Seibert, 2001) believe that the concept of external proximity makes the Manager able to change a part of his environment through his relational network.

2. The experienced human resources, the reputation of the company and its non-transferable know-how and finally the financial resources are also considered by the Managers as key resources mobilized by the SMEs in time of crisis.

3. Moreover, in response to the crisis, the SMEs are developing certain practices and some essential skills that help strengthen their resilience in the face of the crisis. Among these practices, there is innovation and the improvisation that are favored by the simplified coordination mechanisms, the flexible organizational structure and the entrepreneurial culture that characterize SMEs. Also, it was noted at the level of the literature that the improvisation and innovation reinforce the resilience of the SMEs. According to (Crossan, 2005), the improvisation can be conceptualized as a process of response to crisis. In addition, (Milburn and al., 1983; Shrivastava, 1988; Quarantelli, 1988) believe that the crisis is a situation that poses a threat to the functioning, the objectives and values of the organization and which calls for the formulation of new innovative practices.

The Different Strategies and Managerial Practices Adopted by Companies to Respond to the Crisis Promote the Organizational Learning

According to Morin (1994), the crisis considered as the carrier of experience, or even as an organizational experience as a whole, has an impact on the organizational learning. In addition, (Hamel and Prahalad, 1990; Teece and al., 1997) believe that the learning allows the organization to capitalize on its experience of crises, to put in place the processes of the management of crises both from the point of view of prevention, preparation than that of reaction. Thus we can conclude that the experience of the crisis by SME promotes organizational learning which in turn strengthens the resilience in the face of the crisis. The round trip between the theory and the practice has allowed us to retain a set of proposals emanating from the ground which were supported, developed and discussed through the literature review. These proposals and relationships can be the subject of hypotheses which have to be tested on a broader representative sample with the

objective of validating or refuting them. We have formulated them as follows:

H1-The strategic choices and management practices adopted in time of crisis have an influence on the SMEs resilience in the crisis context.

H2-The perception of the crisis by the leader, considered as a fundamental resource, influences his strategic choices.

H3-The relational network of the Manager, the know-how, experience and involvement of the staff are essential resources mobilized to face crisis.

H4-The improvisation, promoted by simplified mechanisms of coordination and flexible structure strengthens the capacity of resilience of SMEs in time of crisis.

H5- Innovation promoted by an entrepreneurial culture strengthens the capacity to adapt to crisis situations.

H6-The experience of crisis promotes organizational learning.

H7-The organizational learning in turn strengthens the resilience of SMES in the crisis context.

The following graphic represents a model that resumes all the proposals and relations issuing from our research

IV. CONCLUSION

Nowadays, eight years after the beginning of the economic crisis of 2008, this latter is far to being over even if there are signs of recovery. There are always redundancies and bankruptcies of businesses. Many countries are no longer in a period of recession, but some of them still live in serious economic and social problems and their businesses are still struggling to recover. This research aimed to highlight the different managerial practices and strategies adopted to strengthen the resiliency and to ensure the survival of SMEs towards the economic crisis and particularly SMES located at the level of the city of Tangier. Without however claiming to achieve certainties or generalizations, our research, through the interviews carried out with a sample of ten managers allowed the exploration of their perception of the crisis and the managerial practices, which are associated with it. They have made a particular light on the decision making by the leaders in a period of crisis. They have also highlighted the different strategies adopted, the mechanisms of coordination, and the privileged systems of communication and information, etc. In addition, they have opened interesting tracks to investigate about resources and skills essential to the survival of the SMEs and provided insights on the role of specific practices as the improvisation, the innovation and organizational learning in the SMEs resilience strengthening in the context of crisis. On the other hand, the reflection perspectives that we have begun on the resilience of SMEs towards an economic crisis we seem have to be completed in the future. We therefore hope that this research could contribute to the elucidation of some aspects of the problem studied, and that it could trigger new ways of research on a subject which begins to take a lot of importance in recent years: the resilience of SMEs in difficult and complex contexts.

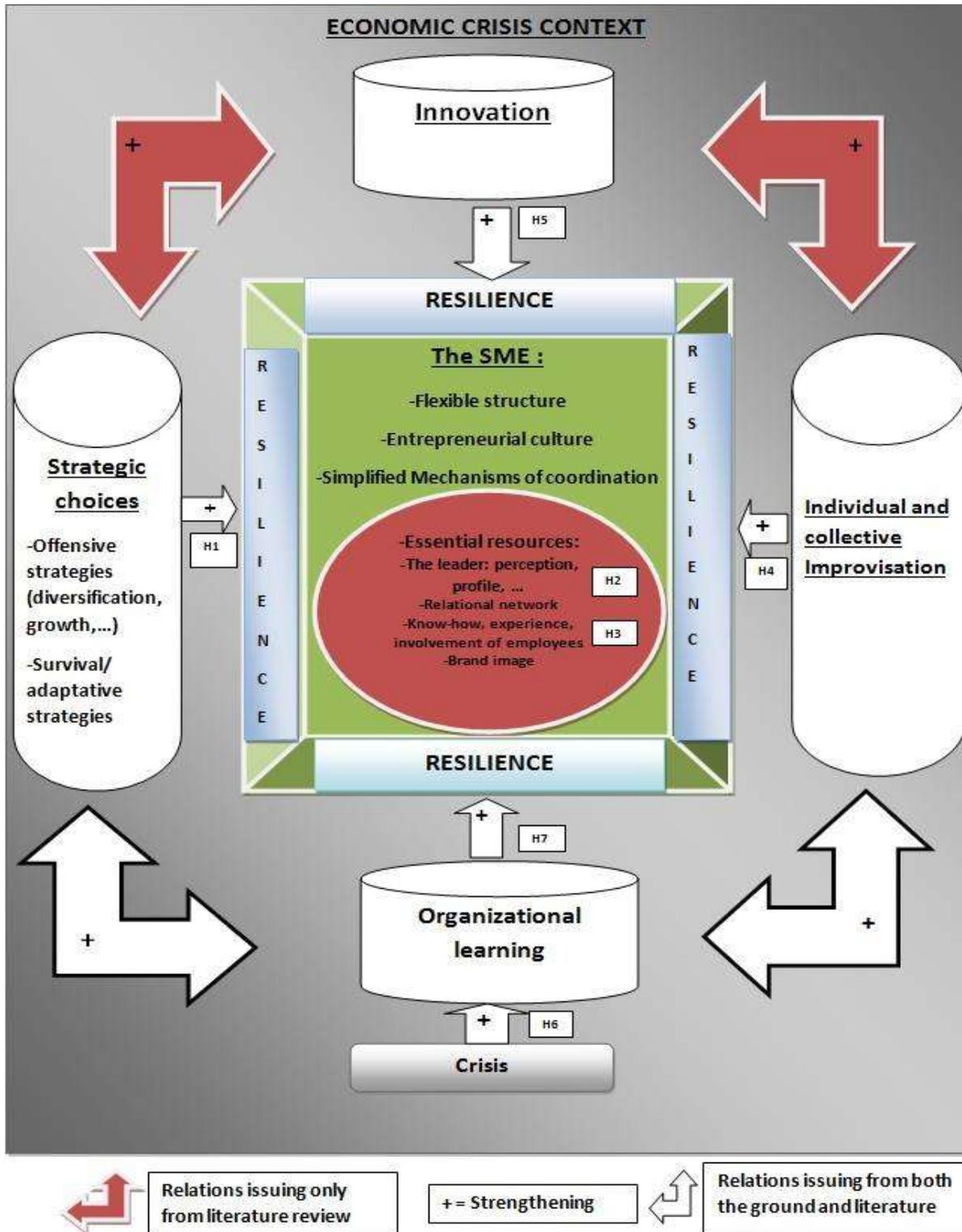


Fig. 1: Model Representing the Proposals and Relations Issuing from Literature and from the Ground

REFERENCES

[1] Bolzinger, A., *Le concept clinique de crise*. Bulletin de Psychologie, Tome XXXV(355), 1982, pp 475- 480.

[2] Brouard, F., & Larivet, S., *Prévention et gestion des crises en PME : apports de la veille et de l'intelligence économique*, 9ème Congrès International Francophone en Entrepreneuriat et PME, Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgique : Communication CIFEPME, 2008.

[3] Braguier, I., *Le comportement organisationnel et stratégique des PME : l'effet de l'incertitude perçue de l'environnement*, ANRT, Université Pierre Mendès France (Grenoble II), 1993.

- [4] Creton, L., "La PME en devenir dans un monde en mutation", Le colloque des Trois Rivières, Revue d'économie industrielle, 32(1), 1999, pp 110-118.
- [5] Crossan, M. & al., "Time and organizational improvisation", Academy of Management Review, 30(1), 2005, pp 129-145.
<https://doi.org/10.5465/AMR.2005.15281441>
- [6] Defrenne, C., & Delvaux, J., Le management de l'incertitude, 4th ed. Bruxelles:De Boeck Université, 1997.
- [7] Dominique GENELOT, Manager dans la complexité : Réflexions à l'usage des dirigeants, INSEP Consulting Editions-4ème édition, 2014.
- [8] Dollinger, M. J., "Environment contacts and financial performance of the small firm", Journal of Small Business Management, 23(1), 1985, pp 24-30.
- [9] Drummond, H., &Chell, E. (1994), "Crisis management in a small business: a tale of two solicitors' firms", Management decision, 32(1), 1994, pp 37-40.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/00251749410050688>
- [10] Edgar, Morin., La méthode, Edition Paris, Seuil, 1991.
- [11] Edmond PASSE, "Crise et improvisation : Les leçons de quatre études de cas", M.S.Thesis, Strasbourg University 2011.
- [12] Eisenhardt, K. M., & Martin, J. A. (2000), "Dynamic capabilities: what are they", Strategic Management Journal, 2000, pp 1105-1121.
[https://doi.org/10.1002/1097-0266\(200010/11\)21:10/11<1105::AID-SMJ133>3.0.CO;2-E](https://doi.org/10.1002/1097-0266(200010/11)21:10/11<1105::AID-SMJ133>3.0.CO;2-E)
- [13] Elenkov, D. S., "Strategic uncertainty and environmental scanning: the case for institutional influences on scanning behavior", Strategic Management Journal, 18(4), 1997.
[https://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1097-0266\(199704\)18:4<287::AID-SMJ865>3.0.CO;2-B](https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1097-0266(199704)18:4<287::AID-SMJ865>3.0.CO;2-B)
- [14] El Akremi, A., La flexibilité est-elle une source d'avantage concurrentiel?, La société flexible : Travail, emploi et organisation en débat, 2005.
- [15] Faber, P., "La motivation du dirigeant de PME : un processus à gérer pour soi-même et l'organisation", M.S.Thesis,Lille 1, 2000.
- [16] Franck DUQUESNOIS, "Les Stratégies Des Petites Entreprises Dans Les Industries En Crise : Une étude des caves particulières de la région vitivinicole du Languedoc-Roussillon", M.S.Thesis , Montpellier University,2011.
- [17] Galaskiewicz, J., &Shatin, D., "Leadership and networking among neighborhood firms", California Management Review, 32(4), 1981, pp 56-70.
- [18] Gasse, Y., & Carrier, C., Gérer la croissance de sa PME, Montréal, Éditions de l'Entrepreneur, 1992.
- [19] Gabriel Zucman , "De la crise boursière à la crise économique", La Découverte , Regards croisés sur l'économie 2008/1 - n° 3-pages 222 à 223.
- [20] Gilles Teneau, La mesure des risques majeurs au croisement de la résilience des systèmes, écologique et psychologique, ISTE Campuss Jemmapes, 6 décembre 2011.
- [21] Gosselin, A., "La revitalisation et la transformation des organisations : un nouveau défi pour la GRH", Revue Internationale de Gestion, 36(1), 1988, pp36-43.
- [22] Grewal, R., &Tansuhaj, P., "Building organizational capabilities for managing economic crisis: The role of marketing orientation and strategic flexibility", Journal of Marketing, vol 65, April 2001, pp 67-80.
<https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.65.2.67.18259>
- [23] Hamel, G., &Prahalad, "Strategic Intent", Harvard business review, 67(3), 1989, pp 63-76.
- [24] Hamel, G., &Prahalad, "Engagez la course pour le futur", L'Expansion, Management Review, 75, 1994, pp 44-52.
- [25] Hitt, M. A., Biermant, L., Shimizu, K., &Kochhar, R., "Direct and moderating effects of human capital on strategy and performance in professional service firms: A resource-based perspective", Academy of Management journal, 44(1), 2001, pp 13-28
<https://doi.org/10.2307/3069334>.
- [26] HoudaGhozzi, L'approche par les ressources et les compétences en tant que théorie de la firme : Apports, limites et aménagements nécessaires, Paris Dauphine University, UMR CNRS n°7088.
- [27] Isabelle Waquet et Nicolas Thibault, "Les crises financières sont-elles une fatalité ?", Idées économiques et sociales, 2013/4 - N° 174 pages 4 à 5 ISSN 2257-5111.
- [28] Jean-François Notebaert et Laurence Attuel-Mendes, Comment la crise est-elle perçue par les managers ?, Centre de Recherche en Gestion des Organisations (CReGO), Bourgogne University : EA7317.
- [29] Julie BOUMRAR, "La crise : levier stratégique d'apprentissage organisationnel", Vie & sciences de l'entreprise 2010/3,2010, pp 185-186.
- [30] Julien, P.-A. , "Vers une typologie multicritère des PME ", Revue internationale PME, 3(3-4), 1990, pp 411-425.
- [31] Julien, P., Les PME : Bilan et perspectives, 3rd edition (Presses Inter Universitaires), 2005.
- [32] Kamoun-Chouk, S., "Comment convaincre de l'utilité de la veille stratégique ?", La Revue des Sciences de Gestion, 2009, pp 195-205.
- [33] Khalife Eliane Aboukhalil, "Le Management des PME Dans Un Contexte De Crise : Le cas du Liban", D.Thesis, Paris Dauphine University, 2014.
- [34] Koenig, G., Management stratégique : paradoxes, interactions et apprentissages, Paris : Nathan, 1996.
- [35] Kœnig, G., "L'apprentissage organisationnel : repérage des lieux", Revue Française de Gestion, 1994, pp 76-83.
- [36] Lagadec, P., La gestion des crises. Outils de réflexion à l'usage des décideurs, Me Graw-Hill, Paris, 1991.
- [37] Lagadec, P., Apprendre à gérer les crises, Editions d'organisation, 1993.
- [38] Lagadec, P., Enseignement sur la question des crises - Enjeux, Obstacles, Initiatives, Ecole Polytechnique Centre National de La Recherche Scientifique, Cahier n°2007-01, Janvier 2007.
- [39] Lalonde, C., "In search of archetypes in crisis management", Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management, 2004, pp. 76-88.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0966-0879.2004.00437.x>
- [40] Libaert, T., La communication de crise, 2nd Edition, Dunod-Paris, 2005.
- [41] Mahe de Boislandelle, Gestion des ressources humaines dans les PME, Broché, 1998.
- [42] Marchesnay, M., "La PME : une gestion spécifique", Economie rurale, 1991, pp .11-17.
- [43] Marchesnay, M, Pour une approche entrepreneuriale de la dynamique Ressources Compétences. Essai de praxéologie, Les Editions de l'ADREG, 2002.
- [44] Marchesnay, M., "La petite entreprise : sortir de l'ignorance", Revue Française de Gestion (3), 2003, pp 107-118.
- [45] Marie-Laure Gavard-Perret, David Gotteland, Alain Jolibert, Méthodologie de la recherche, Pearson Education, 2008.
- [46] Maurice Thévenet, Manager en temps de crise, Groupe Eyrolles, Edition organisations, 2009.
- [47] Moorman, C.& Miner, A.S., "Organizational improvisation and organizational memory", Academy of management review, 23 (4), 1998, pp 698-723.
- [48] Nooteboom, B., Learning and innovation in organizations and economies, Oxford University Press, 2000.
- [49] Olivier TORRES, The Small and Medium-sized enterprise, Dominos-Flammarion Editions, 1999.
- [50] Paradas, A., "Mutualiser la formation et le recrutement dans les PME", La Revue des Sciences de Gestion, 2007, pp 147-155.
- [51] Pascale AUGER, Manager des situations complexes : Quelles compétences développer pour l'entreprise de demain ?, Edition DUNOD, 2008.

- [52] Patrice HERNU, Steve OHANA, L'approche systémique des crises Une vision à travers la crise économique de 2008, cahiers de la sécurité, n°10.
- [53] Penrose, E. T., *The Theory of the Growth of the Firm*, Oxford University Press, 1995. (Original Edition in 1959).
- [54] Peters, T., & Waterman, R. H., *Le Prix de l'Excellence*, Dunod, 2012.
- [55] Prahalad, C. K., & Hamel, G., "The core competence of the corporation", *Harvard business review*, 1990, pp.79-91.
- [56] Probst, G. J. B., Büchel, B. S., *La pratique de l'entreprise apprenante*, les éd. d'Organisation, 1995.
- [57] Puthod, D., & Thévenard, "Coopération, tensions et conflit dans un réseau d'innovation construit autour d'une PME", *Revue Française de Gestion*(5), 2006, pp 181-204.
- [58] Reinhart, C. & Rogoff, K., *This Time Is Different: Eight Centuries of Financial Folly*, Princeton University Press, 2009.
- [59] Roux-Dufort, C., *La gestion de crise : un enjeu stratégique pour les organisations*, Bruxelles : De Boeck Supérieur, 2000.
- [60] Roux-Dufort, C., *Gérer et décider en situation de crise*, 2nd ed, Dunod, 2003.
- [61] Saporta, B., *Stratégies des petites et moyennes entreprises*. Encyclopédie de gestion, 1997, pp 3105-3128.
- [62] Seibert, K. W., "Reflection-in-action: Tools for cultivating on-the-job learning conditions", *Organizational Dynamics*, 27(3), 2000, pp 54-65.
[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0090-2616\(99\)90021-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0090-2616(99)90021-9)
- [63] St-Pierre, J., & Fourcade, C., "Réflexion sur la recherche en PME et sa légitimité dans le domaine des sciences sociales", *Economies et sociétés*, série « Économie de l'entreprise, 20(2), 2009, pp 221-250.
- [64] Teece, D. J., Pisano, G., & Shuen, A., "Dynamic capabilities and strategic management", *Strategic Management Journal*, 1997, 509-533.
[https://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1097-0266\(199708\)18:7<509::AID-SMJ882>3.0.CO;2-Z](https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1097-0266(199708)18:7<509::AID-SMJ882>3.0.CO;2-Z)
- [65] Thiétart, R.-A., collectif, *Méthodes de recherche en management*. Paris, Dunod, 2007.
- [66] Weick, K. E., "The collapse of sense-making in organizations: The Mann Gulch disaster", *Administrative science quarterly*, 1993, pp. 628-652.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/2393339>
- [67] Wernerfelt, B., "A resource based view of the firm", *Strategic Management Journal*, 1984, pp 171-180.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.4250050207>
- [68] Wtterwulghe, R., *La PME : une entreprise humaine*, De Boeck Supérieur, 1998