

SUSTAINABILITY AND STRATEGY IN BRAZIL: WHERE ARE WE GOING?

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1 INTRODUCTION

Due to the growing visibility of sustainability in the media and in the governmental sphere, it is remarkable the increase of social and environmental concern in the organizational scope. Companies have increasingly placed sustainability on their management agenda (Kiron, Kruschwitz, Haanaes, & Velken, 2012), being developed in conjunction with organizational objectives, missions and values. Thus, there are some studies that preaches the need to integrate social and environmental issues into business strategy (*e.g.*, Engert, Rauter, & Baumgartner, 2016; Jin & Bai, 2011) as a way to maximize efficiency and effectiveness in the short and long term. Besides that, the adoption of sustainability in companies requires time (Bansal & Desjardine, 2014), which can corroborate the ideology of their integration into strategy.

It is understood that the publication of academic articles on strategy and sustainability has increased considerably in recent years (Engert *et al.*, 2016; Marques, Kniess, Meira, & Ruiz, 2017). However, the relationship between the two fields seems to need further discussion, because the focus that sustainability needs to be integrated with strategy can generate a misleading view of their interrelationship, leading to a hierarchical overlap that does not necessarily occur or should occur.

It is noteworthy that even though there is a tendency for publications to increase, so far, it was not identified any research that analyzes the relationship between strategy and sustainability in the Brazilian academic context, only in international databases, such as researches by Engert, Rauter and Baumgartner (2016) and by Marques, Kniess, Meira and Ruiz (2017). The review by Engert *et al.* (2016) analyzed 114 articles and only one of these articles was published in a Brazilian journal, while Marques *et al.* (2017) did not consider articles published in Brazil.

Moreover, given that Brazil is a country that has been advancing in the area of organizational studies (Rodrigues & Carrieri, 2001) and has companies that operate in different areas, from agribusiness to creative economy, it shows itself as a relevant research locus. Also, the analysis of sustainability practices in an emerging economy such as Brazil has some challenges, mainly due to the emphasis on the country's economic growth (Duarte, 2017). Therefore, a concomitant analysis of sustainability and strategy in the Brazilian context allows us to study economic, environmental and social factors, promoting greater understanding of the influence of the specificities of the country's business environment on this relationship.

That said, the aim of this study is to understand how the fields of strategy and sustainability have been related in scientific articles published in Brazilian journals with high academic relevance. To this end, a qualitative approach analysis was performed using the integrative literature review method (Botelho, Cunha, & Macedo, 2011) in Brazilian Administration journals, classified as A2 by the Qualis CAPES system in the Sucupira Platform (quadrennium 2013-2016) in the following assessment area: Public and Business Administration, Accounting and Tourism. Thus, when analyzing articles that were published in journals of national excellence, there is a greater credibility in the data and in the articles' contributions.

Based on the results, a framework was proposed to analyze the relationship between sustainability and strategy, consisting of nine interrelated questions. The results of this review were also compared to those of previous international reviews (*e.g.*, Engert *et al.*, 2016; Marques *et al.*, 2017). From this comparison, it was found that there are issues addressed in Brazilian studies that were not mentioned in previous studies, such as the critical approach to

the relationship between sustainability and strategy - present only in Brazilian studies. Additionally, based on the framework proposed, questions for future research are presented.

Given what was mentioned above, this study has potential theoretical contribution, as it allows an interrelational analysis between the fields of strategy and sustainability from a critical and contextual perspective, pointing to essential issues of this relationship that are not considered in previous studies. It also presents a potential practical contribution, as managers working in the field of strategy and sustainability can be based on the findings of this study to boost the adoption of strategies for sustainability.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The discussion of the environmental, social and economic role played by companies has a strong basis in the concept of sustainable development (WCED, 1987), and many organizational scholars use sustainability and sustainable development as synonyms. About this indiscriminate use, it is necessary to understand that the concepts of sustainability and sustainable development are complementary, but distinct (Nascimento, 2018).

The concept of sustainability refers to the concern with the quality of a system based on the inseparable integration between environmental, social and economic issues (Murray, Skene, & Haynes, 2017), characterized by a cross-sectional analysis of the situation experienced in a specific moment. This analysis is operationalized through indicators to obtain quantitative information capable of establishing objectives or goals to be achieved through long-term strategies (Feil & Schreiber, 2017).

Sustainable development can be understood as a way to achieve sustainability, considering that sustainable development seeks to reconcile the paradox that exists between the environmental (strictly related to sustainability) and the economic (development basis) characteristic (Feil & Schreiber, 2017). Its focus is on enabling economic development by preserving the boundaries of the natural ecosystem and preserving the rights of future generations (Geissdoerfer, Savaget, Bocken, & Jan, 2017; Korhonen, Honkasalo, & Seppälä, 2018).

Given this, it is understood that sustainability is broader than sustainable development, requiring long-term action aligned with the strategy (inherent function of the organization), associated with the performance measure to become effective. In addition, it is relevant to emphasize the difference between sustainability and corporate social responsibility, and this differentiation is based on the consideration of the trade-off analysis over time developed by sustainability, while corporate social responsibility does not require or does not consider the trade-offs analysis (Bansal & Desjardine, 2014).

Nowadays, initiatives are being taken to integrate sustainability into organizational business (Scherrer, Daub, & Burge, 2007). Thus, companies' commitment to sustainability is discussed in both theory and practice, and this relationship should consider the strategic approach to ensure that sustainability is an integral part of business (Engert *et al.*, 2016). But what is strategy? To answer this question, it is necessary to understand that over the years, the concept of strategy has been developed based on different definitions.

Ronda-Pupo and Guerras-Martin (2011, p. 180) propose that: "the essence of the strategy's concept is the dynamics of the firm's relationship with its environment for which the necessary actions are taken to achieve its objectives and/or to increase performance through rational use of resources". As well as the authors' definition, other concepts proposed in the literature are intrinsically linked to the economic perspective, especially about the achievement of competitive advantage, leaving social and environmental issues with a lower priority (Nascimento, 2018).

Historically, studies of strategy have advanced in the organizational field, based on discussions concerning the relationship between strategy, structure, and organizational

environment (Ansoff, 1973; Chandler, 1998), between strategy, industry, and competitive dynamics (Porter, 1986, 1991), and about resource-based view (Barney, 1991; Wernerfelt, 1984). These strategic approaches can be related to social, environmental and economic issues, basing the relationship between sustainability and strategy. The process of strategy formation (deliberate or emergent) proposed by Mintzberg (1978) and the logical incrementalism present in this process - suggested by Quinn (1978) - made theoretical advances about the understanding of the bases that underpin strategy formulation in companies. Recent studies show that the formation of sustainability strategies occurs on a continuum between planned and emerging strategies (Neugebauer, Figge, & Hahn, 2016).

Analyzing the existing literature on integrating sustainability and strategy, the literature review developed by Engert *et al.* (2016) demonstrated that this integration was mainly addressed in traditional strategic management research, but was also enriched by interdisciplinary know-how from a corporate sustainability perspective. Besides that, the authors conclude that most articles on the topic are theoretical, requiring further empirical research on the relationship. Another literature review work addressing the relationship between sustainability and strategy was developed by Marques *et al.* (2017). It is widely understood that both literature reviews show the existence of a relationship in which sustainability actions are used (or even explored) to support the companies' strategic performance.

However, the indiscriminate use of sustainability practices for purely strategic purposes can lead to limitations on sustainability effectiveness, since "the relationship between these fields needs to consider a level of criticality, as socio-environmental practices can be used as merely strategic resources for purely strategic purposes, preventing the effective development of sustainability" (Nascimento, 2018, p. 186). Broadening the debate, strategy can be understood through three dimensions: process, content and context (De Wit & Meyer, 2010). For these authors, the process is linked to activities; the content corresponds to the results of these activities; and context can be understood as the factors that influence strategic management.

An analogy can be drawn between the strategic context and Open Systems Theory – broadly spread in organizational studies. Based on this theory, Woodward (1968) and Lawrence and Lorsch (1969) - as quoted in Motta and Vasconcelos (2006) - argue that there is an assumption that the organization is an open system that must adapt to its environment. It is from this understanding that both social and environmental external aspects to the organization must be considered in the formulation of organizational strategies for sustainability. The application of sustainability is inherently dependent on the context in which it is applied, considering the social, economic or ecological perspectives (Brown, Hanson, Liverman, & Merideth, 1987). Thus, the discussion of sustainability can come to an unproductive end without clearly defining the context of social, environmental and economic concerns (Dovers, 1990).

As the sustainability actions required in one location may differ from those required in others, or in different countries, the relationship between sustainability and strategy should consider, above all, the contextual dimension. About this argument, it is understood that both the literature review developed by Engert *et al.* (2016) and Marques *et al.* (2017) approach external contextual influences in a view that can be considered simplistic, as it covers few components. However, the consideration of context in a broad view is necessary because, as Wright, Kroll and Parnell (2000) state, the external environment variables also include economic, political, social, technological and legal issues that may be unpredictable for managers.

Based on the contextual assumption, it is relevant to focus on the development of literature in the Brazilian context, considering that the articles published in Brazilian journals

with high academic relevance are analyzed in this review, based on the contextual dimension that affects both the formation of sustainability and the strategies in organizations. The theoretical arguments discussed in this rationale support the conceptual model presented in Figure 1, which will be taken as the basis for the analysis of the relationship between sustainability and strategy in conducting this literature review.

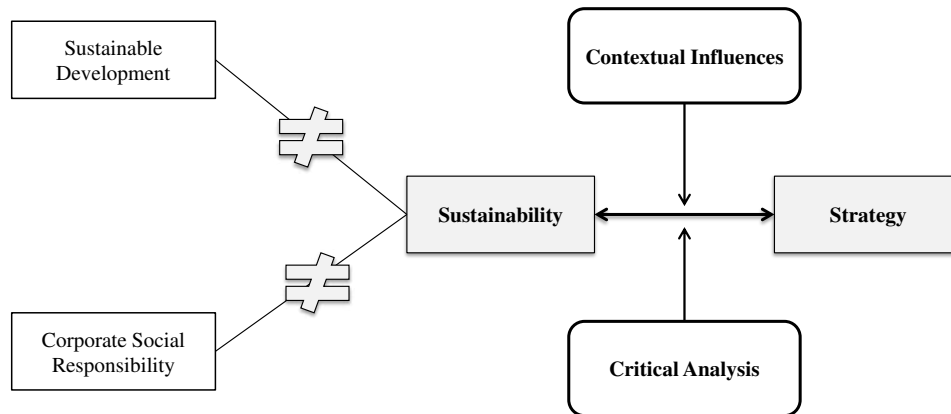


Figure 1. Conceptual Model elaborated from the Theoretical Background
Note. Source: Elaborated by the authors (2019)

3 METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

A qualitative research was conducted using the integrative literature review as a method, which “aims to draw an analysis of the knowledge already built on previous research on a particular topic” (Botelho *et al.*, 2011, p. 127). This method is often used in healthcare and little explored in the field of administration, despite its proven effectiveness (Botelho *et al.*, 2011). Thus, it allows gathering and synthesizing research results on a certain theme, in a systematic and orderly manner, which contributes to the deepening of knowledge about the investigated subject (Mendes, Silveira, & Galvão, 2008).

The review process was composed of a systematic series of steps (Mendes *et al.*, 2008). In the first stage, the terms of search were defined: strategy and sustainability - based on the research objective - and its related terms, as shown in step 1 of Figure 2. The related terms were included, as it was perceived that in many studies some of these terms (*e.g.*, sustainable development) are used as synonyms for sustainability. Then, the Qualis CAPES system was accessed in the Sucupira Platform (2013-2016 quadrennium) with the objective to define the Brazilian academic journals in the area of Administration that would be consulted. This system “is based on a set of formal indicators of organization and editorial process, indexing in databases, and impact factors” (Ferreira, 2015, p. 6). The classification of journals in Qualis goes through the annual update process, being framed in indicative strata of quality: A1 (the highest); A2; B1; B2; B3; B4; B5; and C (zero weight).

The classification of journals in the area of Public Administration and Business, Accounting and Tourism were used as a selection criterion. The articles with the highest academic relevance were searched for, which means those classified in stratum A. Since there are currently no Brazilian Administration journals. classified in stratum A1, all journals classified as A2 in the General Administration area that cover all topics were selected, that is, those that have specific themes within the field of administration were not considered. Thus, we reached the number of nine journals, listed in step 1 of Figure 2.

In the second stage, the websites of each selected journals were accessed and, through the search tool of every journal, it was verified the existence of articles that concomitantly contained the terms 'sustainability' and 'strategy' (or their correlates) in titles, abstracts, or keywords. Thus, articles that simultaneously met these criteria were pre-selected.

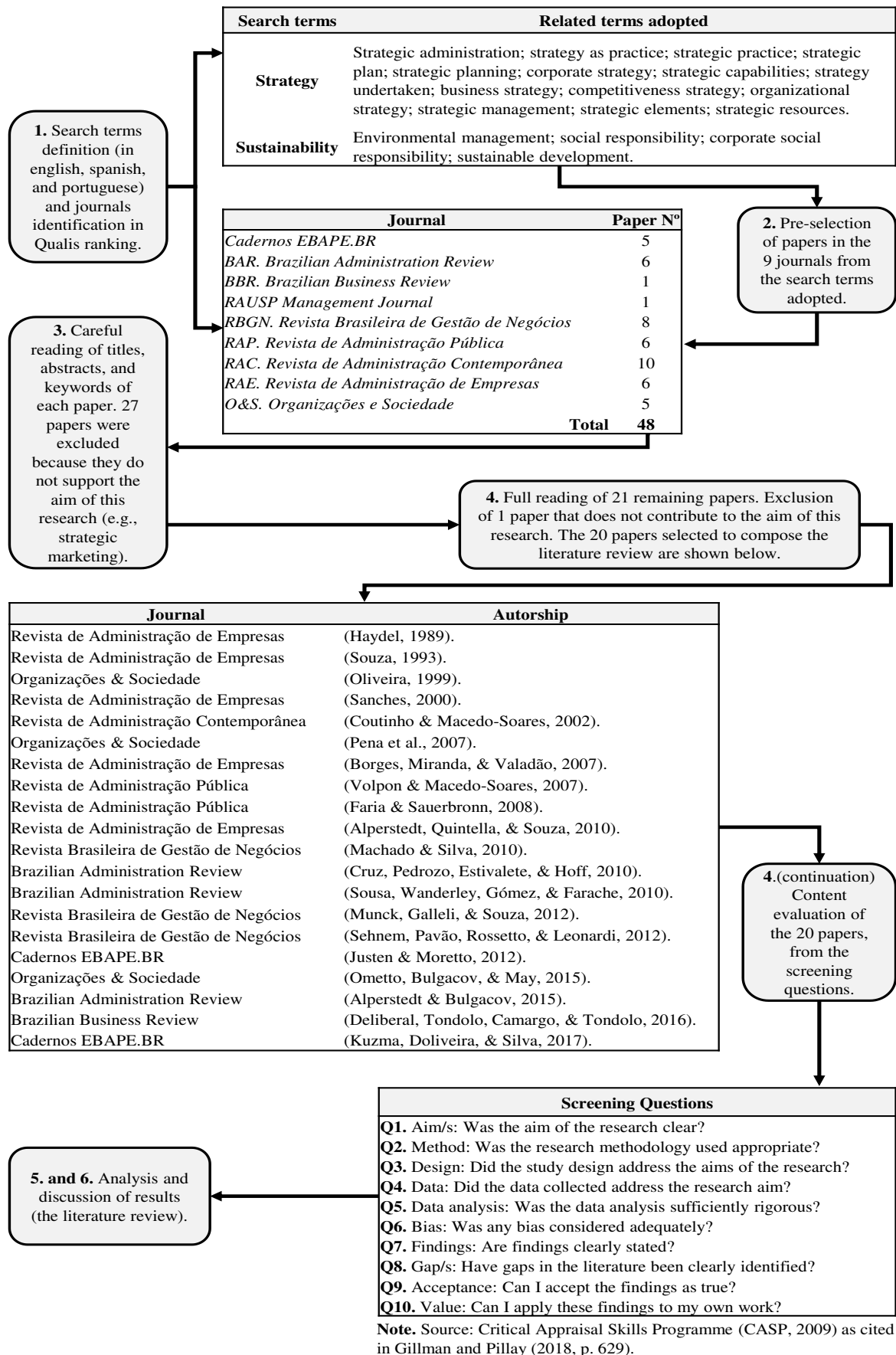


Figure 2. Research Design
Note. Source: Elaborated by the authors (2019)

The pre-selected articles in the nine journals totaled 48, as shown in step 2 of Figure 2, being in Portuguese, English or Spanish. As the period of publication of the article was not limited, we considered articles published from the beginning of each journal until October 2017, which was the completion of this stage. The first article found is from 1989. To update the data, this step was repeated in June 2018 and July 2019.

In the third stage, the titles, abstracts and keywords of each pre-selected article were carefully read. Articles with terms that did not contribute to the search (*e.g.*, strategy of research - method, marketing strategy) were excluded from the analysis. As a result, we excluded twenty-seven articles that were not related to the purpose of this study.

In the fourth stage, we then proceeded to the full reading of the remaining twenty-one articles. After that, one article was excluded, as the construction and results of the study did not match the joint analysis of strategy and sustainability. This article was the only one pre-selected from *RAUSP Management Journal*, so no article from this journal met the inclusion criteria to compose the literature review. The twenty articles selected to compose this literature review are listed in step 4 of Figure 2, dated from 1989 to 2017.

These articles were critically analyzed, based on the questions presented in step 4 (continuation) of Figure 2. Even though these questions were developed in the health area, they present a solid basis for the quality analysis of a research, being useful for the evaluation of articles in other fields of knowledge, including administration. The fifth and sixth stages consisted of the analysis and interpretation of the results, and are presented together in the next section.

4 RESULT ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Through the critical evaluation questions presented in step 4 (continuation) of Figure 2, it was observed that studies published between 1989 and 2000 have limitations on the clarity of its objectives, on the accuracy of data analysis and on the identification of literature gaps that justify the elaboration of the research and/or its contribution to the literature. In addition, it is clear that articles published after 2000 have more robustness in the construction of studies and the research limitations described in these articles focus mainly on the clarity of literature gaps identification. Given this, the analysis suggests that there has been an improvement in the quality of works published in Brazilian journals over time.

In general, the research was characterized by quantitative, qualitative and mixed approaches and differ in the directions and research methods used, being mostly empirical articles. These studies presented – in its majority - analysis of Brazilian companies, such as he works of Alperstedt, Quintella and Souza (2010); Alperstedt and Bulgacov (2015); Borges, Miranda and Valadão (2007); Cruz, Pedrozo, Estivalet, and Hoff (2010); Machado e Silva (2010); Munck, Galleli and Souza (2012); Oliveira (1999); Ometto, Bulgacov and May (2015); Pena *et al.* (2007); Sehnem, Peacock, Rossetto and Leonardi (2012); and Volpon and Macedo-Soares (2007). The choice of Brazilian companies as research locus was due to its accessibility to researchers, since most authors are associated with Brazilian universities.

It was possible to identify that some authors use social responsibility as a concept equivalent to sustainability, just as sustainability and sustainable development are indistinctly defined (Justen & Moretto, 2012). Therefore, the conception of social responsibility is usually associated with sustainable development and sustainability (Ometto *et al.*, 2015). Thus, given the lack of conceptual attention in some Brazilian articles (here analyzed) on aspects that differentiate sustainability from other concepts, an indistinct analysis of the various concepts was adopted, since even if they do not represent sustainability in its central character as proposed by Feil and Schreiber (2017), the analyzed articles address sustainability issues even if they define them as social responsibility, sustainable development or address issues specific to just one dimension of sustainability - such as environmental management.

The main issues identified in the relationship between sustainability and strategy in the analyzed articles are presented below.

4.1 Identified issues in the literature review - the proposed framework

The articles were explored based on a thematic/categorical content analysis (Bardin, 2016), and after the analysis and the interpretation of the results, the literature review showed the existence of nine essential issues (which are the analysis categories) that support the relationship between strategy and sustainability: 1) Change process; 2) Specialized managers; 3) Process of strategy formulation; 4) Strategic sustainability networks; 5) Social and environmental focus; 6) Application and evaluation tools; 7) Contextual influences; 8) Proactivity and reactivity; and 9) Critical analysis. It is noteworthy that the issues contextual influences and critical analysis were defined from the Conceptual Model proposed in the theoretical background section, and the other issues emerged from the data analysis. These issues emerged during the careful reading of each article, and the recurrence of certain themes in the articles analyzed allowed the grouping of ideas presented and, thus, the recurring arguments in more than one article were grouped by the researchers in nine issues, according to the potential of these for the relational analysis proposed in this study. The issues are interconnected in the activity process of organizations that relate sustainability to strategy, and the last one (Critical Analysis) demonstrated a core value in the analysis of the relationship between sustainability and strategy, permeating all other issues. Based on these issues and on its interactions in the relational process, a theoretical framework is proposed to analyze the relationship between sustainability and strategy in Figure 3. The issues that compose the framework are detailed in the following subtopics.

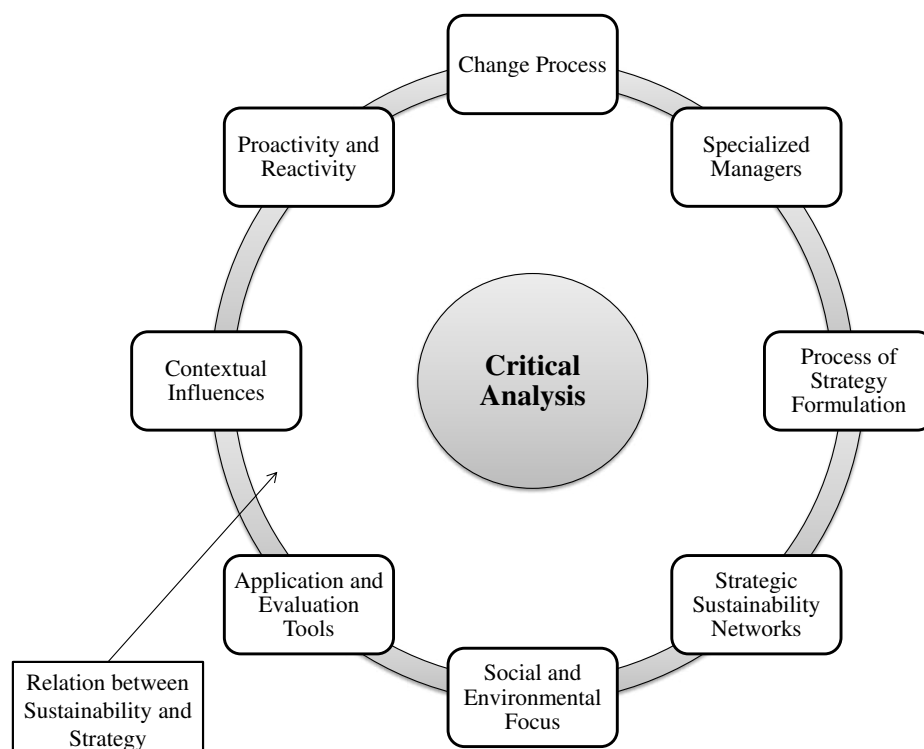


Figure 3. Proposed Framework to analyze the Relations between Sustainability and Strategy
Note. Source: Elaborated by the authors (2019)

4.1.1 Change process

Considering social and environmental issues, new attitudes in the business operation and in the form of organization are required, which drives continuous change (Sanches,

2000). Thus, concerns about social responsibility lead companies to implement changes that, to be effective, must be aligned with the company's strategy (Coutinho & Macedo-Soares, 2002). These authors state that sometimes it is necessary for the company to start a change of values in search of an appropriate culture to the quality of life and to the participation of its members so that, further, it is possible to implement a change on social responsibility in a strategic way.

From the perspective of Alperstedt and Bulgacov (2015, p. 290) "the discourse of strategy refers not only to the idiosyncratic product of a certain corporate culture, but as part of considerable social change with effects that go beyond the organization". For these authors, social practices can be analyzed from a strategic perspective (strategy as practice) and from an environmental perspective, considering that such practices can be cognitive, behavioral, procedural, discursive, motivational and physical, being possible to state that "the organizations strive to improve their management practices in strategic ways that help them to respond to social and environmental demands" (Kuzma *et al.*, 2017, p. 430), which occurs through the process of organizational change.

4.1.2 Specialized managers

An important issue to be considered is that, in some companies, it is identified the concern about the creation of specific departments that deal with environmental management, resulting in a modification of the hierarchical structure (Oliveira, 1999). Likewise, Sanches (2000) presents the need for new managerial talents to deal with the environmental dimension. However, many companies do not have the position of environmental manager in the organization chart, showing that the lack of specialized professionals in the subject is a deadlock (Machado & Silva, 2010).

It is considered that managers need to be directly involved in the formation process of the organizational culture directed to the environmental strategy and that employees need to know the importance of social and environmental issues for decision making and for the organization's strategy (Ometto *et al.*, 2015; Sehnem *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, the people who are part of the organization are the main source of (intangible) resources, thus, require greater attention for the correct adoption of social and environmental practices in the company in a strategic way (Sehnem *et al.*, 2012), making it necessary for organizations to have specialized managers in strategy and sustainability.

4.1.3 Process of strategy formulation

Multinational leaders believe that corporate social responsibility is critical to achieve global goals through long-term plans (Cruz *et al.*, 2010; Haydel, 1989). Thus, when considering a long-term strategic vision, social responsibility is part of strategic planning (Machado & Silva, 2010; Pena *et al.*, 2007), and is an efficient and effective way to address social and environmental problems and needs (Sanches, 2000). However, the research of Machado and Silva (2010) identifies a company that uses incremental practices combined with planning in the formation of its strategies (Mintzberg, 1978), also corroborating to the logical incrementalism (Quinn, 1978) which advocates the formation of certain strategies as a learning process. Thus, sustainability-related strategies can be deliberate (*e.g.*, strategic planning) or emerging (Neugebauer, Figge & Hahn, 2016).

4.1.4 Strategic sustainability networks

To sustain the competitive advantage, companies seek to intensify alliances and develop networks, but social responsibility actions need to be aligned with all companies' strategies that compose these alliances or networks (Volpon & Macedo-Soares, 2007). Some companies are concerned about doing business only with organizations that are also environmentally and

socially responsible (Machado & Silva, 2010), contributing to broaden sustainability actions strategically throughout the production chain (or value chain) and beyond their local or regional operations.

4.1.5 Social and environmental focus

For some companies, it is important to focus on social aspects (Haydel, 1989), highlighting actions in favor of education and health (Borges *et al.*, 2007). In addition to social issues, environmental protection has become relevant in business strategies, becoming an important element of strategy, management practice and technological innovation (Oliveira, 1999; Souza, 1993). In Brazilian business environment, social responsibility is gaining prominence, but its motivations are of different natures (Coutinho & Macedo-Soares, 2002), since companies position themselves in different ways regarding social or environmental responsibility (Volpon & Macedo- Soares, 2007).

The environmental, social and economic dimensions of sustainability are subsystems that must be developed in a balanced manner (Munck *et al.*, 2012). However, most of the studies analyzed here do not follow this guideline and generally deal with social and environmental aspects, not focusing on the economic dimension of sustainability. Therefore, it is understood that the focus on social and environmental issues emerges as a way to compensate the traditional lack of attention of these issues by companies, because the functionalist thinking argues that the greatest contribution a company can make to society is in relation to economic prosperity (Porter & Kramer, 2006).

4.1.6 Application and evaluation tools

Throughout the analysis, it was identified that there is a deficiency in relation to the instruments used to implement and measure the effectiveness of strategic actions for sustainability. Many companies do not have or are still implementing instruments to measure the results generated by social responsibility programs (Haydel, 1989). Even though there are few measures to verify the environmental performance in companies, it is important to focus on the construction of techniques and tools to make this assessment (Machado & Silva, 2010).

Concerned about the measurement of environmental and economic actions, Munck *et al.* (2012) proposed a model for measuring the level of business ecoefficiency from the identification of the delivery levels of organizational skills supporting ecoefficiency. Coutinho and Macedo-Soares (2002) propose a model that allows the analysis of strategic adequacy of the implementation of actions that aim social responsibility. Considering the strategic character of sustainability, it is noteworthy that “evaluation techniques seem to be the weakest point of the strategic management process” (Haydel 1989, p. 17). Thus, it is understandable that the lack of tools to implement and measure sustainability makes it impossible to control or improve social, environmental and economic actions.

4.1.7 Contextual influences

The context has a strong influence on the positioning and course of actions that companies perform in their social systems. In an interaction analysis between multinational units, it can be stated that there is little information consultation between headquarters and their subsidiaries in other countries, which interferes the definition of social objectives (Haydel, 1989). Likewise, Souza (1993, p. 50) states that “environmental protection measures are being awakened, in some cases, by multinationals, which transfer to the Brazilian headquarters the guidelines outlined in their central offices”.

It is noticeable the lack of understanding of the headquarters about the endogenous conditions and situations experienced by the subsidiaries in their contexts (social, cultural, political and environmental), with only a replication of actions from one context to another,

making it difficult to carry out socio-environmental actions, since it is necessary to consider global needs as well as local conditions of the subsidiaries in the social responsibility actions undertaken by the headquarters (Cruz *et al.*, 2010).

Historically, companies in Brazil and in developed countries do not give the appropriate importance to the environmental dimension and its impacts on their business activities, which hinders the development of adequate responses (Sanches, 2000). However, Brazilian companies are increasingly concerned about social responsibility, so that the environmental dimension now includes an important factor in their strategic agendas (Coutinho & Macedo-Soares, 2002). Both organizational and contextual characteristics are essential for understanding the course of action to be taken for sustainability, as social and environmental initiatives can alter contextual competitive relationships, enabling increased quality of relationships in the business environment (Sousa *et al.*, 2010).

The approach between corporate sustainability and strategy studies can be analyzed through some approaches and organizational theories, namely: agency theory; firm theory; resource-based view; institutional theory; and stakeholder theory (Borges *et al.*, 2007). Thus, it is possible to identify that the actions of competitors also influence the behavior of the company by institutionalizing some practices (Machado & Silva, 2010), and according to Faria and Sauerbronn (2008, p. 25) “in the context of globalization, some researchers began to explore institutional theory to deal with corporate social responsibility issues under a strategic approach.”

According to Machado and Silva (2010, p. 408), “the adoption of an environmental approach, less than a voluntary decision of the company, must be understood as a decision permeated by its own contingencies and contexts”, and sustainability can be treated as a strategy to adapt to the environment (Pena *et al.*, 2007). In contingency theory, the organization is seen as adaptable to the environment in its specific context, which was revealed in the texts analyzed in this literature review.

4.1.8 Proactivity and reactivity

The social responsibility actions found in multinationals are more reactive than proactive (Haydel, 1989), since they adopt policies that meet minimum external requirements (Oliveira, 1999; Alperstedt & Bulgacov, 2015). This is because “many managers still respond to environmental issues and therefore understand them as expenses without seeing returns through environmental actions” (Deliberal, Tondolo, Camargo, & Tondolo, 2016, p. 123). On the other hand, it can also be seen that companies are beginning to glimpse business opportunities through social responsibility practices - initiating proactive actions (Alperstedt *et al.*, 2010; Coutinho & Macedo-Soares, 2002; Machado & Silva, 2010; Sanches, 2000), because a preventive action costs less and is more efficient (Souza, 1993).

4.1.9 Critical analysis

During the analysis, it was found that environmental management is not yet being dealt with a strategic bias by companies (Alperstedt & Bulgacov, 2015), being the relationship between environmental management and strategy still very incipient and requiring greater alignment (Machado & Silva, 2010). For Kuzma, Doliveira e Silva (2017), sustainability should not be analyzed just as a discourse on ecology and economy, but as an ideological and political discourse. Thus, there is a separation between discourse and practice about environmental actions in companies (Alperstedt *et al.*, 2010).

In accordance with what was said, Kuzma *et al.* (2017, p. 442) identified that “the discourse that involves the generation of organizational competencies focused on sustainability actions is far from practical reality and does not always produce effects that impact the operational dimension of organizations”. Thus, it is necessary to develop critical

reflexivity about the characteristics of the strategy area, but such questions have not been valued by some researchers who consider the approach of social responsibility and strategy a tactic that large corporations use to regain their legitimacy and reputation (Faria & Sauerbronn, 2008).

Moreover, the strategic approach usually reproduces the models developed in the United States of America (USA) without questioning the neutrality or historical background of the area (Faria & Sauerbronn, 2008). This indiscriminate acceptance of foreign models tends to impoverish the cultural and historical variety of Brazilian reality (Justen & Moretto, 2012). Similarly, Ramos (1965) criticizes the indiscriminate assimilation of theories coming from other countries without an analysis and contextualization for the considered country - specifically in Brazil.

Finally, “strategically planning for sustainability involves a new critical, reflective dialogical and communicative view in the relationships between man and man; man and organization; environment and organization; and environment and man” (Justen & Moretto, 2012, p. 748), in a way that the approach of the strategy area to sustainability also contemplates the public dimension, in which social issues do not become mere strategic and political resources for the capitalist vision of large corporations (Faria & Sauerbronn, 2008).

5 CORRELATION WITH PRIOR REVIEWS

Two recent literature reviews were identified that analyzed the relationship between sustainability and strategy. The first work (Marques *et al.*, 2017) identifies three intellectual bases that have influenced the study of strategy and sustainability: (i) the relationship between sustainability and competitiveness; (ii) the relationship between resources/capabilities for competitive advantage with sustainability; (iii) environmental influence on competitive advantage considering sustainability. The second study (Engert *et al.*, 2016) brings the integration between sustainability and strategy based on three essential areas: (i) organizational influences; (ii) internal and external conductors; and (iii) supporting factors. One of the components of the second area proposed by Engert *et al.* (2016) is the competitive advantage, also highlighted in the review by Marques *et al.* (2017).

Thus, the findings of previous reviews were related to those of the present research, which allowed us to verify that the results related to national publications are not distant from the results of international publications, based on the relationship between sustainability and competitive advantage as one of the issues cited in Brazilian articles (*e.g.*, Alperstedt & Bulgacov, 2015; Coutinho & Macedo-Soares, 2002; Deliberal *et al.*, 2016; Kuzma *et al.*, 2017; Munck *et al.*, 2012; Ometto *et al.*, 2015; Pena *et al.*, 2007; Sanches, 2000; Souza, 1993; Sousa *et al.*, 2010; Volpon & Macedo-Soares, 2007).

Regarding the contextual aspects, it is clear that, unlike the international results found in previous reviews, the findings of Brazilian articles (*e.g.*, Alperstedt & Bullgacov, 2015; Borges *et al.*, 2007; Coutinho & Macedo-Soares, 2002; Cruz *et al.*, 2010; Faria & Sauerbronn, 2008; Haydel, 1989; Machado & Silva, 2010; Pena *et al.*, 2007; Sanches, 2000; Souza, 1993) deepen the discussion on contextual aspects that influence the relationship between sustainability and strategy, focusing on discussions about organizational theories that were not cited in previous reviews.

6 FINAL REMARKS

It is possible to state that the scientific production of Brazilian business journals with high academic relevance has related the fields of sustainability and strategy through nine questions that compose the theoretical framework proposed in this review (Figure 3). The ninth question (Critical Analysis) plays a central role in the framework, demonstrating the critical consideration in Brazilian scientific production about the relationship between

sustainability and strategy in organizations. This critical analysis was not identified in previous reviews developed by Engert *et al.* (2016) and Marques *et al.* (2017). Thus, it is suggested that the relationship between sustainability and strategy requires a critical analysis as a core value, in a way that sustainability is not disseminated as a mere fallacious discourse and incompatible with the adopted practices in organizations.

Based on the theoretical framework, some questions are raised in Figure 4 that can be analyzed in future research, as a form of theoretical improvement of the relationship between sustainability and strategy. These questions arose from the intersection of the issues that compose the proposed theoretical framework.

Framework Issues	Future Research Agenda
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Change Process 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Understand the level of change (both internal and external) that companies adopt to develop an effective relationship between sustainability and strategy.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Specialized managers 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Verify the creation of positions for managers specialized in sustainability in companies and what previous knowledge and skills are required of these professionals. 3. Analyze the level of decision making of these managers specialized in sustainability and how they can strategically interfere in the actions of other sectors of an organization.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Contextual influences ● Process of strategy formulation ● Proactivity and reactivity 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Analyze the relationship between contextual influences and their impacts on the process of formulating sustainability strategies, checking whether they tend to be proactive or reactive as a function of contextual influence.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Strategic sustainability networks 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Identify the occurrence of networks or strategic alliances for sustainability in both large corporations and small enterprises. 6. Verify how these strategic relationships are formed and what mechanisms companies use to ensure the sustainability requirements were met by business partners.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Application and evaluation tools 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Analyze the main tools of implementation and sustainability assessment in organizations and how these tools can be replicated by companies in different contexts and different industries.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Social and environmental focus ● Contextual influences 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Analyze whether the focus on social or environmental actions derives from the specific sector of companies or whether organizations in the same sector in different regional contexts can focus on other actions for sustainability, checking whether the focus on the social or environmental dimension is derived from the local contextual influences and not from the industry in which the company operates.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Critical analysis 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Evaluate the occurrence of critical analysis about the relationship between sustainability and strategy in the companies' performance, since this position is theoretically discussed by scholars, being necessary to empirically verify if companies pay attention to these issues when adopting sustainability practices strategically.

Figure 4. Future Research Agenda based on the Proposed Framework

Note. Source: Elaborated by the authors (2019)

Comparatively, while the international prior review formulated by Engert *et al.* (2016) advocates the integration of sustainability into strategy, the results of this literature review in the Brazilian context show that such integration is incompatible, and there should be a

relationship between sustainability and strategy, considering a critical look at this relationship to avoid being just a tactic for the reach of profitability.

Based on the results of this research, scholars in the field of strategy and sustainability will be able to broaden the knowledge about the bases that underlie the relationship between these fields in a developing country, with their own contextual aspects. Still on the academic field, it is necessary to emphasize that the Brazilian articles analyzed here demonstrate the lack of conceptual delimitation by scholars about the sustainability theme, because in many articles sustainability is used as a synonym of sustainable development and/or corporate social responsibility. This is a misuse, according to the conceptual model presented in Figure 1. In addition, organizational managers can deepen their knowledge of these issues and how to improve the relationship between sustainability and strategy in the organizational environment, allowing the improvement of sustainability practices in a sustainable way, especially through the issues exposed in the proposed theoretical framework.

Finally, it is noteworthy that the adoption of a qualitative approach in conducting this review generated certain limitations, such as the lack of analysis of bibliometric issues (e.g., citations and co-citations), which could be performed in a quantitative approach. The focus on Brazilian management journals qualified as A2 can be understood as another limitation, since the number of articles found was low and most of these articles were published more than five years ago. Thus, the expansion to journals of other Qualis strata could increase the number of articles and, consequently, deepen the discussion. In addition to these limitations, the central question (critical analysis) of the proposed theoretical framework was developed based on the authors' perspectives of the articles analyzed in this review, and there is no empirical evidence of the consideration of this critical perspective by managers in conducting business.

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