

CREATING VALUE FOR SUSTAINABILITY: an analysis of the applied use of Stakeholder Theory

ALEX JOSE DE ALMEIDA

PONTIFÍCIA UNIVERSIDADE CATÓLICA DE MINAS GERAIS

BENDEGÚZ BÍRÓ

ARMINDO DOS SANTOS DE SOUSA TEODÓSIO

Introdução

In this work, we want to explore more about how the definitions of Stakeholder Theory are implemented in sustainability literature. If there is any other dominant theory in this field and if yes, then which and why are there different definitions, and theoretical backgrounds? It's also important to reveal how these definitions changed or developed in sustainability research literature in the last years. Where they expanded or reduced and if yes then why? We will also use different dimensions of sustainability, based on the triple bottom line concept (John Elkington, 1994).

Problema de Pesquisa e Objetivo

Our paper will answer how the concept of value creation is embedded in studies related to sustainability, comparing the applied use with the original concept from Edward Freeman in the Stakeholder Theory? As auxiliary objectives, this work aimed to provide theoretical analysis for studies on value creation as a concept in sustainability and to propose new research paths.

Fundamentação Teórica

The literature review presented above demonstrates the advances and evolution of Stakeholder Theory over the years, recognizing here the importance of these advances and developments, in the present work, we will use as a basis and focus on the original definitions presented by Freeman. (Freeman, 1984; Freeman et al., 2010). In this case, another important concept discussed in Freeman's classic work, in addition to the definition of the term, is the concept of value creation, which indicates that companies must create value for their stakeholders.

Metodologia

As the methodology considered in the present work of bibliometric analysis, a qualitative meta-analysis was used as a literature review technique, having as a methodological basis the same procedures used by Jhuniore et al., (2021). In this work, the authors carried out a bibliographic analysis of the concept of co-creation of value in Stakeholder Theory, in this case, without focusing on the field of sustainability.

Análise dos Resultados

First, our work agreed that Stakeholder Theory is one of the major approaches in social, environmental and sustainability management research (Garvare & Johansson, 2010; Frynas & Yamahaki, 2013; Hrisch et al., 2014; Montiel & Delgado-Ceballos, 2014; Wang, 2017). Considering the way of thinking about value creation it was the only recognized theory. Our results shows also that less than 10 % of the articles use the definition of Edward Freeman about value creation even though there isn't any other major cited definition.

Conclusão

We argued how the value creation process, an important concept of Stakeholder Theory, has been applied in the field of sustainability. Our work based on an analysis of publications what showed that: First, Stakeholder Theory is the dominant approach in this literature, but only some of the works refer directly to the original concept of Freeman. Second, articles with the highest impact from the last two decades do not discuss deeply the definition of value creation and there is no existing general way to describe value creation in the literature.

Referências Bibliográficas

Donaldson, T., & Preston, L. E. (1995). The Stakeholder Theory of the corporation: Concepts, evidence, and implications. *Academy of Management Review*, 20(1), 65–91. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1995.9503271992> Freeman, R. E. (1984). *Strategic management: A stakeholder approach*. Pitman. Freeman, R. E. (2017). Five challenges to Stakeholder Theory: A report on research in Progress. *Stakeholder Management*, 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1108/s2514-175920170000001> Freeman, R. E., Harrison, J. S., Wicks, A. C., Purnell, L., & de Colle, S. (2010). Stakeholder Theory: the state of the art. *Academy of Mana*

Palavras Chave

Stakeholder Theory, Sustainability, Value Creation

Agradecimento a órgão de fomento

Thanks to the CAPES, CNPq and FAPEMIG.

CREATING VALUE FOR SUSTAINABILITY: an analysis of the applied use of Stakeholder Theory

1. INTRODUCTION

Considering that Stakeholder Theory is one of the major, if not the most frequently used, approach in social, environmental and sustainability management research (Garvare & Johansson, 2010; Frynas & Yamahaki, 2013; Hrisch *et al.*, 2014; Montiel & Delgado- Ceballos, 2014; Wang, 2017). In our view, due the important use in sustainability literature, it is necessary to understand how the value creation process, an important concept of Stakeholder Theory, has been applied in the field of sustainability and assess whether its use approaches the theoretical bases of the base theory, especially in the seminar definition of Edward Freeman (1984).

One way to assess the advance of knowledge on a given topic is the analysis of publications dealing with the topic. This method has been tested successfully and it's used by other researchers also in recent years. It means that our work covers a wide literature review, but our result will come from the analysis of each collected article. The present work will seek to understand how the literature on sustainability has been working on the concept of creating value for stakeholders. In a practical way, the work will seek to evaluate the published literature that covers the process of creating value for stakeholders in the field of sustainability, through the content analysis of publications that cover these definitions. Currently, there are not existing similar works that are focusing on the adaptation of the definition of value creation from Stakeholder Theory to the sustainability management literature. But, by connecting there three important research topics, it could show important results and new research paths.

In this work, we want to explore more about how the definitions of Stakeholder Theory are implemented in sustainability literature. If there is any other dominant theory in this field and if yes, then which and why are there different definitions, and theoretical backgrounds? It's also important to reveal how these definitions changed or developed in sustainability research literature in the last years. Where they expanded or reduced and if yes then why? We will also use different dimensions of sustainability, based on the triple bottom line concept (John Elkington, 1994.) to analyze the applied use of value creation concept in the studied field.

Like many seminal concepts in management studies, the Stakeholder Theory has been criticized. The literature points out some redefinitions and advances that would be important to consider in the approach proposed by Freeman (1984). We can find an extensive range of literature presenting critical points to the Stakeholder Theory (Weiss, 1995) and proposals to improve the theoretical model to address stakeholders' relevant issues to the corporate strategy and the promotion of Sustainability in contemporary societies (Fassin, 2008; Mainardes, Alves & Raposo, 2011). In this context, research about the role of the Stakeholder Theory in Sustainability studies is more relevant yet.

By examining how the definitions changed in time we can detail how it has evolved. We can also point out the milestone articles and the researchers and institutions with the bigger effect on the definition. Also, it could give a base for future researches to explore these changes and more nuanced details within the subcategories and fields of sustainability. With this knowledge about the changes and their reasons, further researches could examine if the changes are parallel to how other fields adopt and develop the value creation definition. If there are differences than in the future it would be possible to find out if the changed form has a better use at Stakeholder Theory or in any other relevant literature. Furthermore, our research may point out characteristics of the sustainability literature by pointing out in what conditions it uses what are the typical forms of the definitions and how it emphasizes the main parts of the value creation process.

By collecting all the relevant articles and by analyzing them we can achieve a deeper knowledge about the field of sustainability and Stakeholder Theory so we explore new topics and research methods. Also, it helps us to see what are the current hot topics of the field and to have a structured picture about the relevant and dominant journals and researchers. With this extra knowledge we will be able to continue our work and do further researches and analyses on the topic. Thus, the contribution of this study is to present an overview of researches related to the use of Stakeholder Theory in sustainability literature through the analysis of publications. Knowing the current stage of development of studies on the subject is of great importance for the advancement of future research in the area.

Our paper is structured in sessions where can find the research problem and objective, the theoretical discussion, with three main issues (Stakeholder Theory, Value Creation, and Sustainability), the methods of this bibliometric research, the results, and discussions that support the final remarks of this article.

2. RESEARCH PROBLEM AND OBJECTIVE

The connections between Stakeholder Theory and sustainability, especially in the sustainability management literature has been researched already, but none of these articles show up how the definition of value creation has been adopted to the sustainability literature. By collecting and analyzing information from the relevant articles we aim to describe how the definition changed by examining it in different dimensions. This can provide detailed knowledge and promising new research paths. In addition, it helps us to achieve a wider picture about the current hot topics of the field.

In this context, our paper will answer how the concept of value creation is embedded in studies related to sustainability, comparing the applied use with the original concept from Edward Freeman in the Stakeholder Theory? As auxiliary objectives, this work aimed to provide a theoretical analysis for studies on value creation as a concept in sustainability and to propose new research paths.

3. THEORETICAL REASONING

3.1 Stakeholder Theory and value creation

Stakeholder Theory finds its most used theoretical basis in the book by Freeman (1984), who defines stakeholder as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives”. According to (Jensen, 2001), while the theory of value maximization (the company's objective is to increase its profit for shareholders) is based on economics, the Stakeholder Theory resulted from sociology, organizational behavior, special interest policies and the interests of the managers themselves.

It is known that the term was used in the field of Management for the first time in the 60s, more precisely in a memorandum of the Stanford Research Institute (SRI) in 1963, defining stakeholders as “*those groups that, without support, the organization would cease to exist*”, indicating that managers needed to induce constructive contributions with them to obtain the desired results. At that time the objective was to point out all the groups without which the companies could not exist (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). However, other definitions and classifications have also been developed over the years by several authors (Driscoll & Starik, 2004; Mitchell et al., 1997; Wood et al., 2018). The present work will be guided by the most used definition of stakeholders, that is, the

one presented in the book by Freeman (1984). Additionally, in terms of concepts used in Stakeholder Theory, an important contribution is presented in the work Donaldson & Preston (1995) is the categorization of the types of use of stakeholder, which can be defined as three types of use: descriptive, instrumental and normative. Descriptive usage is used by the company to describe and understand its relationships and roles internally and externally. When managers use the tools, the instrumental aspect is evidenced and, finally, the normative use refers to the intrinsic recognition by managers of the importance of all the company's stakeholders.

Clarkson (1995) made a significant contribution to the theory, from the definition of the concepts of primary and secondary stakeholders, which are related to the survival of the company. This author indicates that the company should focus on the so-called primary stakeholders, whose have a greater relationship with the business and, therefore, have greater importance, and that their existence could be made unfeasible by them, with less importance when compared to the secondary stakeholders.

Mitchell et al. (1997), present one of the most used models for stakeholder classification, which as widely used in other studies (Benneworth & Jongbloed, 2010, Ian & Hjortso, 2019). Based on this model, stakeholders have different levels of power, legitimacy and urgency (Mitchell et al., 1997).

Harrison et al. (2010), points out the advantages of stakeholder management. According to these authors, a company that manages for stakeholders allocates more resources to satisfy the needs and demands of its legitimate stakeholders than what would be necessary to simply maintain their voluntary participation in the company's productive activities. However, companies that manage for stakeholders develop relationships of trust based on principles of distributive, procedural and interactional justice. The competitive advantages arising from a management approach for stakeholders are sustainable because they are associated, for example, with dependence on the firm's trajectory and stakeholders. Yet, these explanations provide a strong justification for including Stakeholder Theory in the discussion of competitiveness and business performance (Harrison *et al.*, 2010).

Although the brief literature review presented above demonstrates the advances and evolution of Stakeholder Theory over the years, recognizing here the importance of these advances and developments, in the present work, we will use as a basis and focus on the original definitions presented by Freeman. (Freeman, 1984; Freeman et al., 2010). In this case, another important concept discussed in Freeman's classic work, in addition to the definition of the term, is the concept of value creation, which indicates that companies must create value for their stakeholders. Thus, the main objective of a company is to create value for its Stakeholders, which describes as those groups without whose support the business would no longer be viable (Freeman, 2017).

Freeman (1984) argues that companies that seek to create value for stakeholders may act in this way for a long period of time, which can be understood as a form of business perpetuation. Still, it is known in the literature that maintaining and developing relationships with stakeholders are essential in creating value for an organization (Sachs, 2002). The approach discussed here, not only for the concept of value creation, but for the whole theory of value is that the company must focus its efforts not only on maximizing shareholder wealth (economic value creation), generating value for all its stakeholders. In this sense, the value creation process can be understood from the increase in revenue and financial wealth of companies, to issues of well-being, working conditions and relationships with communities close to the businesses, for example.

Argandoña (2011) argues that in a stakeholder model, value creation implies that: 1) all those who create or capture value, or who in their relationship with the company assume risks, whether within

the company (owners, managers, employees) or outside (consumers, suppliers), or who are impacted by company externalities or misinformation (local community, environment, future generations, society in general), should be considered stakeholders – at least for value distribution purposes. 2) maximizing value for consumers and providers of resources is not enough to guarantee a social optimum, as there are other relevant stakeholders to consider. 3) in the relationships between stakeholders and the company, there are other variables to be taken into account in addition to the exchange of goods or services for a price, whether there are alternatives (alternatives that limit market power), whether information is provided (including the means to process and use it rationally), whether protection is available against negative externalities (whether those affected have the means to defend themselves against externalities), and so on (Argandoña, 2011).

Still within the concept of creating value for stakeholders, Hart and Milstein (2003) developed a concept of sustainable value in which they characterize temporal and spatial dimensions of value. They suggested strategic guidelines for sustainability, an article in which a widely cited framework is suggested. For these authors, the definition of sustainable value is given as: “strategies and practices that contribute to a more sustainable world and at the same time drive shareholder value” (Hart and Milstein, 2003). Thus, creating value based on sustainability for stakeholders creates economic value through contributing to sustainability. Furthermore, it requires not only creating value for the company or its shareholders, but also for other company stakeholders (Hörisch et al., 2004).

In a way, the creation of sustainable value can be understood as one of the aspects of the use of Stakeholder Theory, regarding the application of the theory of value creation in the applied field of sustainability, something that will be discussed throughout the present study. Székely & Knirsch (2005), for example, argue that value creation itself is done in a responsible and sustainable way. Demonstrating here a relationship between the theory of stakeholders, sustainability and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), the latter, considered one of the greatest forms of current business management.

Freeman (2017) believes that one of the next steps for Stakeholder Theory is to see Stakeholder Theory as a way to redefine how we think about value creation. Freeman sees the business as a set of value-creating relationships between groups that have an interest in the activities that make up the business.

3.2 Sustainability

The issues related to Sustainability are a fundamental guide for humanity, in the sense of maintaining themselves for long periods in social, health and environmental good conditions (Salas-Zapata et al. 2011). Since the first reports on the subject (Dovers & Handmer, 1992; Wackernagel & Rees, 1996), several authors have addressed the growing consensus that the environment in which we live is not capable of sustaining indefinitely the level of economic activity and the consumption of raw materials that we have demanded. Allied to this, there is the fact of world economic growth advancing at higher levels of exploration each year, when one can predict the depletion of the planet's capacity in the future scenario (Sartori et al, 2014).

Sustainability is known in the literature as the ability that people, the environment or even a set of them have to adapt to human or natural pressures in a given period of time, usually in the long term (Dovers & Handmer, 1992). It should be noted here that the term sustainability is not used only in the environmental area, but is also used, for example, to describe the ability of companies to adapt to business pressures in the medium and long term. However, it is noteworthy that in the present work we will address more broadly the issue of sustainability and its relationship with sustainable

development from an environmental point of view. In order to form the conceptual basis for a better understanding of the present study and the impacts of these themes on the finances of big companies. In this context, Sustainable Development can be understood as an intentional search in corporations to support the environmental pressures caused by humanity, or even improving the quality of environmental systems, responding to the needs of the environment and natural issues.

Sustainability can also be evaluated as a set of legal or natural norms about how human beings should act in relation to nature and how these actions can define the future and generations to come (Ayres, 2008). Undoubtedly, in the context of the growing anthropization that we have been dealing with today, such concepts are fundamental to be understood not only for companies, but for all human beings, in the search for better and more harmonious living conditions with the planet and with the natural resources available to our and future generations.

Sartori *et al.* (2014), argue that sustainable development is the way to reach sustainability, that is, the ultimate goal in the long term. We can understand that with the growing importance of environmental issues and that sustainable development does not only cover natural issues, linked to the environment, and important issues such as human well-being and economics must also be considered. Thus, we come to the conclusion that sustainable development is only achieved when these different aspects are brought together, in a multidisciplinary and holistic analysis (Ergene, Barnejee & Hoffman, 2021). These strands can be understood as the famous term “*Triple Bottom Line*”, developed by Elkington (1994). This author indicates that sustainability is formed by the balance of the three pillars mentioned above: environmental, economic and social, which, together, were the necessary bases for the perpetuation of the condition of human existence not only in business, but in life of human populations and living ecosystems on the planet.

Now, taking a closer look at the use of Stakeholder Theory in sustainability publications shows that many rather vaguely refer to stakeholders or even misinterpret the approach (cf. Elms, Johnson Cramer, & Berman, 2011; Freeman, Harrison, Wicks, Parmar, & de Colle, 2010; Phillips, Freeman, & Wicks, 2003). Starik & Kanashiro (2013) identify fruitful fields for future research as they encourage sustainability scholars “*to continue to explore how traditional theories can be used to examine and advance sustainability management*” (Starik, Marcus, & Illitch, 2000). Garvare and Johansson (2010) recognize a similar research gap, as they state that the “*relation between Sustainability, Stakeholder Theory and Quality Management can still be developed.*”

In recent years, there has been an explosion of work in the field of Sustainability, especially considering the recent explosions of ESG approaches (Monteiro, Miranda, Rodrigues, V. P.; & Saes, 2021). The reason for that is, probably the increase of socio environmental problems that we are facing in the last years in a worldwide view. For example, when analyzing the Web of Science database, looking for articles that address the term “Sustainability” in titles, we identified 47.908 published works of which 73,5% refer to the last 10 years (2012 to 2021). The same search using the term “ESG” in titles, we found 555 published works of which 75% refer to the last 10 years.

4. METHODS

As the methodology considered in the present work of bibliometric analysis, a qualitative meta-analysis was used as a literature review technique, having as a methodological basis the same procedures used by Jhuniór *et al.*, (2021). In this work, the authors carried out a bibliographic analysis of the concept of co-creation of value in Stakeholder Theory, in this case, without focusing on the field of sustainability.

Zimmer (2006) indicates that a meta-analysis is a systematic investigation based on comparisons and analysis of data from primary research, considered to be significant in relation to the subject in focus. The objective is to develop theoretical knowledge aiming at greater possibility of applications in practical situations and further studies (Zimmer, 2006).

In this case, a seven-step research model proposed by Cooper (2015) and also used by Jhuniar *et al.* (2021) was used: (1) Identification/formulation of the investigation problem; (2) Literature collection; (3) Collection of information from each study; (4) Study quality assessment; (5) Analysis and synthesis of the discussions/results of the studies; (6) Interpretation of collected data; and (7) Presentation of research results.

The first item was presented in the initial sessions of the present study. At this point, since the present work is a literature review, it will be used to obtain articles referring to the topics studied here must be chosen, corresponding to step two of the methodology used.

Thus, for the assembly of the present study, the bibliographic survey was carried out in the Scopus database, since in this database it is possible to search for the target keywords of the research in several sections of the articles, including the search in its abstract.

The selected final works were examined and then definitions of value creation were extracted, based on Stakeholder Theory. Subsequently, a matrix was developed containing factors such as research fields that deal with the topic, in addition to conceptual and methodological preferences (theoretical and empirical) in the analyzed articles. In this way, the elaborated matrix presents the main positions related to the study, as well as regarding their quality. In addition, the elaborated matrix allowed the development of subsequent meta-analysis steps.

With this framework and including the theoretical analysis of the Stakeholder Theory, it is possible to present propositions about how studies involving the perspective of value creation in the sustainability literature and possible interconnections with the stakeholder literature. This allows us to fulfill the article's objectives of mapping the literature and pointing out relationships that can be observed. Furthermore, propositions for new research paths considering such relationships are discussed.

A limitation of the method adopted is the restriction of access to all articles published in the collections of the consulted libraries. When an article is not available for download, the treatment given will be explained in the results section of the present work.

4.1 Data Collect

As previously mentioned, a first search was performed for articles in the journals of the Scopus database in "Titles", "Abstracts" and "Keywords", resulting in a total of 326 articles found. The search parameters were: Name 1: Sustainability; and Name 2: Stakeholder; and Name 3: "Value creation". In this case, it is considered that a high number of articles was found and probably, some are not related to the subjects discussed here. Thus, a pre-analysis was established to exclude articles that are not related to our study objective.

In the pre-analysis stage, initially, those articles that are not related to the topic researched here were excluded. Therefore, works in the following areas of knowledge were excluded: Informatics; Math; Biochemistry, Genetics and Molecular Biology; Chemical engineer; Medicine; Vet; Pharmacology, Toxicology and Pharmacy; Physics and Astronomy. At this moment, the database had a total of 290 articles. In addition, the Books, Books, Editorials and Notes Chapters were excluded, resulting in a total of 246 articles. Finally, excluding works still in the "in press"

publication phase, the final database had a total of 240 articles, which supported the sociometric analysis.

4.2 Data Analysis

For the final analysis of the collected data, a descriptive analysis of the most cited works was performed, for which what 100 most cited works were chosen. The search for the most cited articles is objectified by the fact that these are, in theory, articles recognized and legitimized in their respective areas in the analytical search for connections between “Value Creation” and “Sustainability”. The most cited article had 1,438 citations and the 100th most cited article had 8 citations.

After the analysis and sociometric evaluation used the 240 articles present in the original database, the definitions on the creation of value used and on the general characteristics of the analyzed works were extracted for the 100 most cited works. In this way, the matrix used provided the main positions related to the study of value creation in the field of sustainability.

With this framework and including the Theory of Stakeholders, proposals for studies involving the perspective of value creation and its possibilities of interconnections with the literature of stakeholders will be presented in the next section. This allows us to fulfill the main objective of the present work of mapping the literature and pointing out the relationships that can be observed between value creation and Stakeholder Theory. Finally, at the end of the work, proposals for new research paths considering such relationships are discussed.

5. RESULTS

In the light of the parameters used the articles found in the literature were published between the years 2002 to 2022. So, publications prior to the beginning of the 200s were not found. The **Table 1** shows the number of publications collected per year of publication. Observe that the highest number of publications occurred in the last 10 years.

Table 1 – Number of papers by year.

Year	Number of publications	Year	Number of publications	Year	Number of publications
2002	2	2009	0	2016	21
2003	0	2010	4	2017	9
2004	0	2011	3	2018	25
2005	1	2012	7	2019	29
2006	2	2013	5	2020	35
2007	2	2014	8	2021	52
2008	2	2015	10	2021	23

In our research the most important journals by the number of articles are: Sustainability (Switzerland) (13), Journal of Cleaner Production (11), Business Strategy and the Environment (6), Journal of Business Ethics (5).

For a better understanding of our data (240 papers), a sociometric analysis was initially used so that in a structured and organized way, the articles resulting from the research were classified, finding patterns and links between them. The sociometric analysis allows the relational networks to be detected, converting the qualitative into quantitative and allowing

the data to be tabulated and transformed into graphs that will show the situation of each element in a group (Ribeiro et al., 2015). Sociometry also confirms the existence of patterns that are characteristic of group organization, its own expressions, and configurations (Van Eck & Waltman, 2014). For this research, the sociometric analysis is used to analyze the co-citations map resulting from the data collection, and to analyze how other topics are connecting with the idea of value creation, analyzing the most used keywords. To present the sociometric analysis of the data, version 1.6.8 of the VOSViewer software was used. The search for more cited articles is objectified by the fact that these are already, in theory, articles recognized and legitimized in their respective fields.

In **Figure 1** we can describe how sustainability and value creation in the center of a network can dialogue with other concepts such as: Business model, competition, corporate responsibility and other closer in this network. These topics can be considering the areas where Stakeholder Theory and sustainability can be applied in companies managing strategies. Our intention here is to show how the focus on value creation in sustainability can be used as a business strategy in companies. In **Figure 2** we can describe three mainly authors in the network. Observe that we have a central author for the color of the figure. The most important for us is Freeman in the center of the green side. In the blue we have Schaltegger and Ludeke-freund in the red side. We also can observe Vargo on the yellow side. These authors can be understood in terms of references in futures researchers on Stakeholder Theory and sustainability together. In the **Figure 3** there's no clear center in this figure, showing that we don't have a country that contributes more or less in both areas together (sustainability and value creation). In this case, the knowledge in the last two decades is provided from different countries around the world.

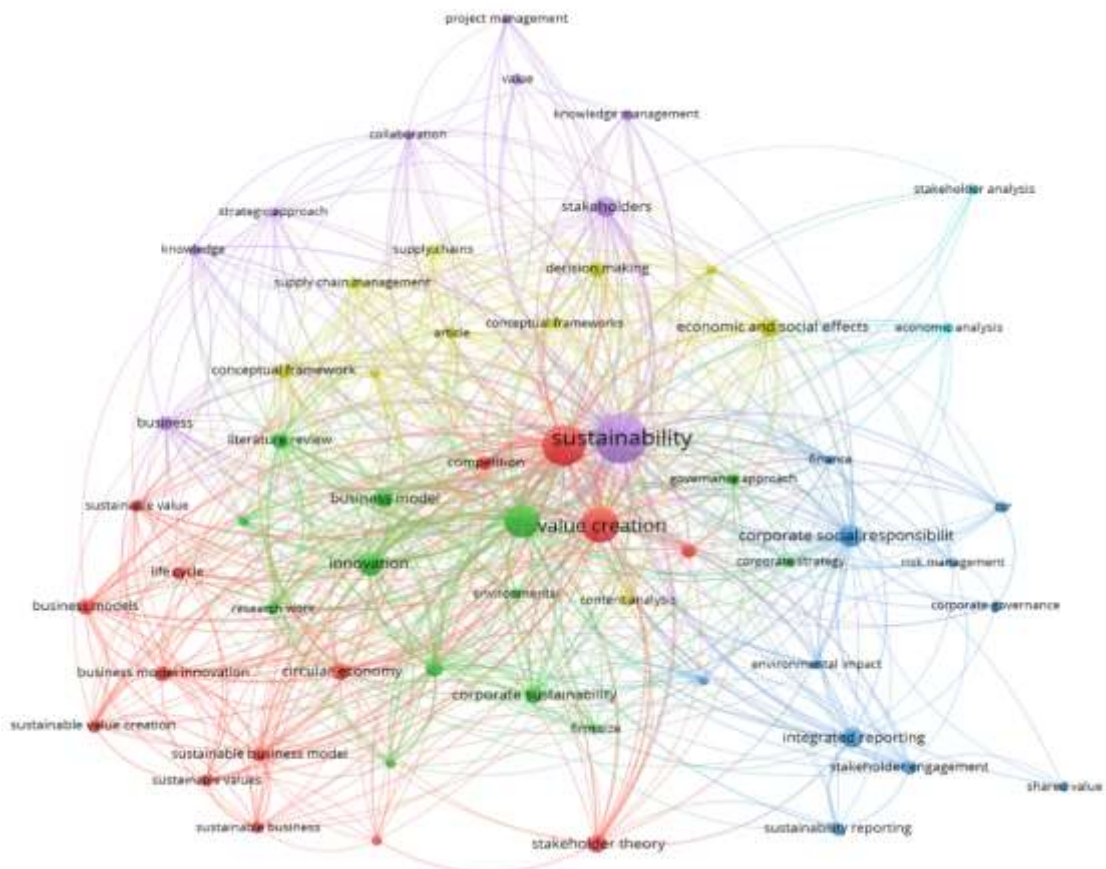


Figure 1 – Bibliometric analysis by keywords.

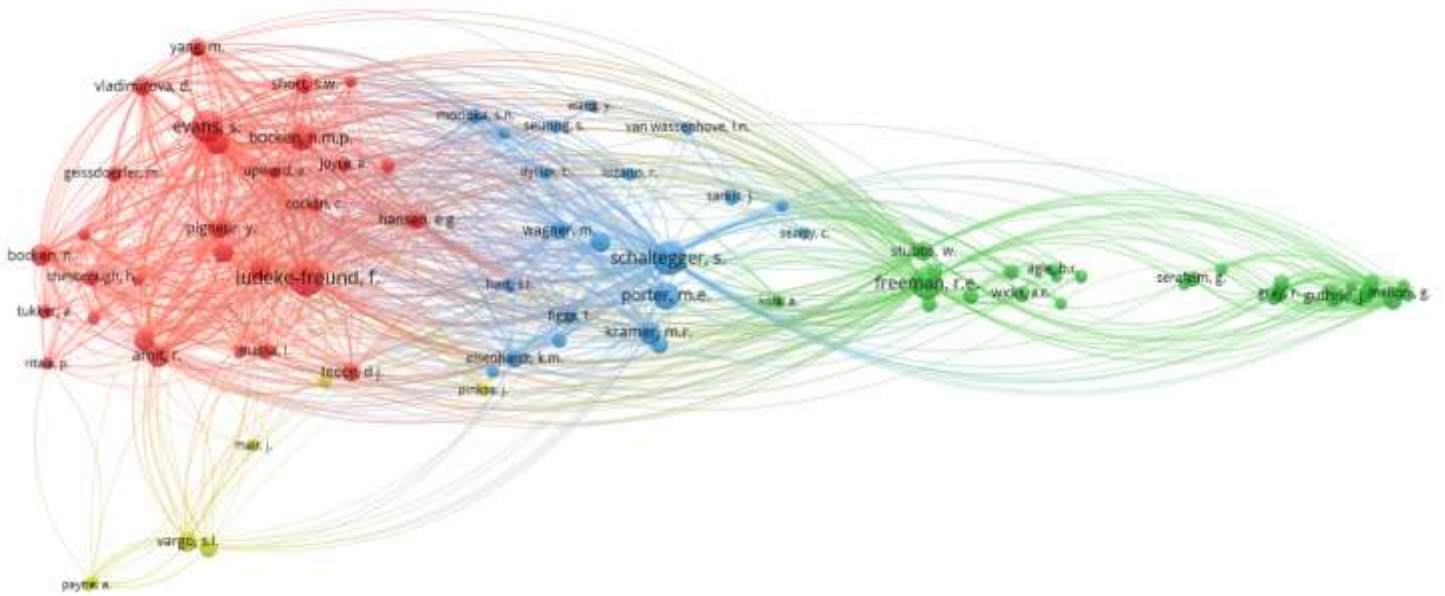


Figure 2 – Bibliometric analysis by co-cited authors.

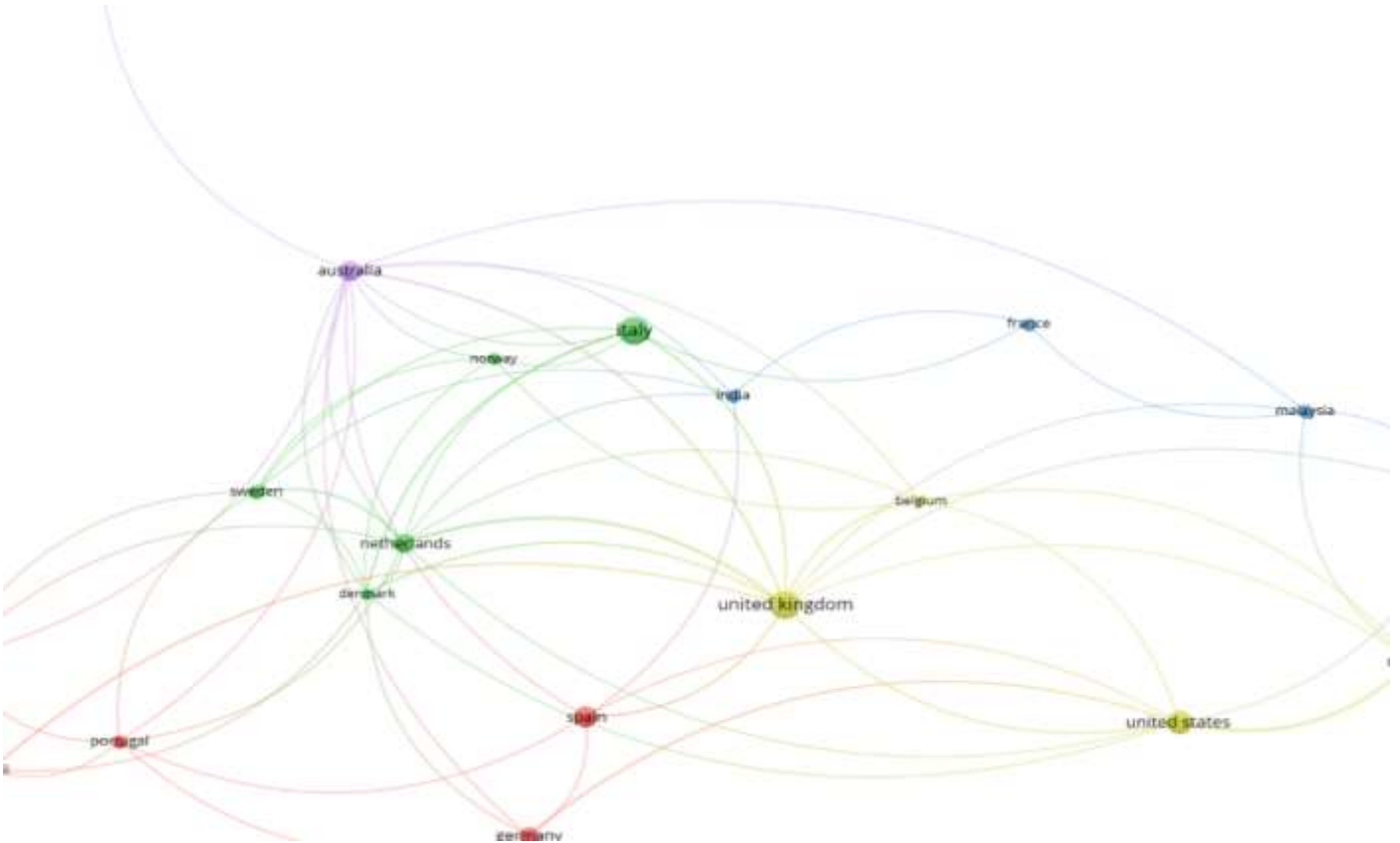


Figure 3 – Bibliometric analysis by country of origin.

After the sociometric analysis and evaluation, researches developed in the 100th most cited papers were examined, and the definitions about the value creation used were extracted. Considering the 100th most cited articles in the Scopus database used, only 22 were

unavailable. Thus, we developed the analysis of 78 different articles (39 for each student in 2 weeks) by individually reading all sections of these works.

All the articles do not define value creation, instead they use the applied concept to describe dimensions of the sustainability (economic, social or environmental). We used the triple bottom line as a model to describe the concept of sustainability because the major of the analyzed articles (99 articles) consider one, two or the three dimensions of sustainability: Economic, Social and Environmental (based on triple bottom line dimensions of John Elkington, 1994). But we found another possibility when only one article used a wider concept which is the EGSEE (“*The goal of firm value creation can be achieved when management considers the interests of all stakeholders and integrates all five economic, governance, social, ethical, and environmental dimensions of sustainability performance into managerial strategies, actions and reporting*” (Rezaee, 2016)).

Even the theoretical articles are based on the application of the concept of value creation in sustainability field and not theorizing about it. Most of them mention as an important part of (sustainable) business model (sustainable value creation is an important concept in this field.). In our analysis 88% of the articles use all the three dimensions among their analysis, 6% of the analyzed papers used 2 dimensions and 6% of the analyzed papers used 1 dimension.

This way it was hard to identify from which theory is it from. When its detailed, it’s always came from the Stakeholder Theory. Typically, in those articles where possible to identify from what theory is it adopt the value creation definitions, published after 2015. Before 2015 Stakeholder Theory is not a recognizable dominant theory among the collected articles but there’s no idea for that once the Stakeholder Theory was developed in 1984 by Freeman in his seminar book (Freeman, 1984). In details, 35 from 78 articles does not provide any definition of what is “value creation” or the applied use of this concept.

On the other hand, 43 articles presented some definition of “value creation” but these 36 presented only the applied use in the sustainability field (For instance: “*Create and maintain long term economic, social, and environmental value for all stakeholders*” – Rejeb & Rejeb, 2020). Only 7 articles related it to the concept from an original view of Edward Freeman. From these 7 articles that are related to the original concept of Freeman: 5 refer to Freeman, 1984; 1 refer to Freeman *et al.*, 2010; and 1 refer to Freeman *et al.*, 2007 and also to Freeman *et al.*, 2004.

By dividing the articles by methodological preferences, we found out that empirical researches are more common after 2015 and became dominant after 2019. 54 are empirical articles; 20 are theoretical articles and 4 are empirical and theoretical approaches. This result shows that most part of the literature that use value creation concept come from empirical studies that discuss different dimensions of the sustainability in an applied way. This configuration can explain why we didn’t find clearly definitions of value creation in sustainability literature.

“*Long-term value creation*” is also an important concept in the sustainability field and refers to efforts to create long term value for stakeholders from a business perspective. There is an implicit idea in the sustainability literature that previously the companies created value in the short term in contrary with the current objectives.

As the articles are usually not defining value creation and especially not using a general way to describe the definition. We decided propose the categorization of the articles, first by what

dimensions of sustainability are they integrating to their explanations about value creation and second, who is the beneficiary of the (sustainable) value creation. So, how the triple bottom line is integrated to the definition of value creation and who is the beneficiary the (sustainable) value creation? Based on that we found 4 categorizations, that are proposed as follow:

1. – “*for business / for business sustainability*” - It has not built in social and environmental dimensions to value creation definition but may focus on business sustainability from a stakeholder view (19 articles);
2. – “*value creation focusses on triple bottom line for stakeholders*” - It focusing on both stakeholders and distinct dimensions such as environment when discussing the definitions of value creation (18 articles)
3. – “*socially responsible business sustainability*”- It emphasize socially responsible business sustainability in value creation from a stakeholder view, but dismiss the environmental dimension. focusing on stakeholders so dismiss environment (5 articles)
4. – “*value creation focusses on triple bottom line for shareholders*” - It focusing on both shareholders and distinct dimensions such as environment when discussing the definitions of value creation (2 articles). (Besides these only one article used a wider concept which is the above mentioned EGSEE).

Among those articles which describe how the authors think about value creation (44) the result is the following: 43% has not built in social and environmental dimensions to value creation but may focus on business sustainability. 11% emphasize socially responsible business sustainability, but dismiss the environmental dimension. In contrary, there is no work which focus only on the environmental aspects of business sustainability and dismiss the social dimension. The most of the researches 45% in the category of value creation focus on triple bottom line for stakeholder/shareholders. Almost all these value creation definitions are from a stakeholder view. It means that they emphasize how the different dimensions of sustainability create value for the stakeholders. Only two articles emphasize the emphasize how the different dimensions of sustainability create value for the stakeholders. After this we wanted to know if there is any factor which determine that the article how define value creation. Our result shows that it is not dependent on the publication year, the standard deviation is large. The situation is the same with the methodological preferences (if the research is theoretical or empirical), the standard deviation is large. Considering of which group of articles are more cited we found that there is not a relevant difference between them. The most important factor is the publisher. Those articles which are published in a journal with an important focus on environmental and social sustainability, also the value creation definition integrates these aspects. On the other hand, the articles published in journals with less focus on environmental and social dimensions, contains value creation definitions which does not contain environmental and social dimensions.

6. DISCUSSION

First, our work agreed that Stakeholder Theory is one of the major approaches in social, environmental and sustainability management research (Garvare & Johansson, 2010; Frynas & Yamahaki, 2013; Hrisch et al., 2014; Montiel & Delgado- Ceballos, 2014; Wang, 2017).

Considering the way of thinking about value creation it was the only recognized theory. Our results shows also that less than 10 % of the articles use the definition of Edward Freeman about value creation even though there isn't any other major cited definition.

In a similar way, Jhuniar *et al.* (2021), analyzed the concept of co-creation value inside Stakeholder Theory and the contributions from the literature in another literature review. In this case, co-creation value refers when the value is created between the company and two kinds of stakeholder: customers and consumers. The difference from our analysis because we analyzed the creation value from companies in a one way with the idea from customers and consumers perspectives. Another difference is because we chose a specific area, sustainability. Beside these differences the both articles revealing the growth trend of the fields of business and management using the Freeman ideas, as well as the developed propositions, encourage new research on Stakeholder Theory.

Another similar work is the article by Hörisch *et al.*, (2014), in which the authors examine links, similarities, and dissimilarities between Stakeholder Theory and sustainability management. Based on the analysis a conceptual framework is developed to increase the applicability and the application of Stakeholder Theory in sustainability management. Concluding the analysis, the authors identified challenges of managing stakeholder relationships for sustainability. To address these challenges is suggested that companies have to create value to stakeholders showing the relevance of the present study where was proposed a systematic review about the creation value on sustainability literature.

This work recognizes the fact that works in the topic does not discuss in details value creation and they, in many cases don't adopt new ideas about it. This fact could cause a limitation of the results of the works. By building in new aspects and ideas about value creation, researches could find better result for their objectives. To avoid this, we recommend further works on how the new ideas about value creation could enter to the works of sustainability literature. For this it's necessary to collect more information about other theories and literatures besides the Stakeholder Theory and make our research more connected to the real impact in the stakeholders reality, trough more engaged and empathic research (Ergene, Barnejee & Hoffman, 2021).

Another way to open new aspects is to focus on new dimensions of sustainability, such as governance and ethical instead of not stepping further than the triple bottom line idea. Our results shows that there is not any evolving path in time about how the literature discuss value creation. It could mean that it's not a central question, but we found that for journals it matters. Some of the journals where the articles are published finds it important to expand and connect with new dimensions the value creation process while other journals stay with the original idea. It would be interesting to examine exactly what cause this difference. If it caused by the group of editors or by another factor and if there are any other differences between the two types of journals in this view.

At same time when our work opened new research direction, it encountered several difficulties. First a significant part of the researches does not discuss the definition of value creation in any way and they don't even refer to previous works about it. This fact has reduced the number of works on what we could do our measures. Also, our work could not find any answers for some of its objectives, such as evolving paths of the discussed definition in time and pointing out the milestone articles. We could not find any path what the researches follows regarding how to define value creation as it's not part of discussion in the

last two decades. However, around half of the articles represent connections between sustainability and value creation, we could not find any other area in what the definition or the aspect about value creation would change. Despite of this was not the objective of the current work it would be worth full for further researches to explore more about how the idea of value creation evolved in the recent years besides the applied use in the Stakeholder Theory.

On other hand we could find some new connections between sustainability and value creation. These changes could be examined in the literature of Stakeholder Theory to find out its sustainability literature could reflect to it after adopting the way of thinking about value creation. Research like this, could find interesting results about how two different literatures can help to each other by developing a definition together from different aspects. It could detect opportunities what new results are not changed yet between the two discussed literature. Also, it could give a base for future researches to explore these changes and more nuanced details within the subcategories and fields of sustainability. With these knowledges about the changes and their reasons, further researches could examine if the changes are parallel how other field adopt and develop the value creation definition. If there are differences than in the future, it would be possible to find out if the changed form has a better use at Stakeholder Theory or in any other relevant literature.

5. FINAL REMARKS

We argued how the value creation process, an important concept of Stakeholder Theory, has been applied in the field of sustainability. Our work based on an analysis of publications what showed that: First, Stakeholder Theory is the dominant approach in this literature, but only some of the works refer directly to the original concept of Freeman. Second, articles with the highest impact from the last two decades do not discuss deeply the definition of value creation and there is no existing general way to describe value creation in the literature. And third, depending on the focus of the publisher journal, half of the articles set the definition of value creation in a strong relationship with sustainability and with the triple bottom line view, but the other half of the articles does not do it.

Other factors do not appear relevant on how the value creation definition evolves. In 2022 it's an exemption that an article uses a wider view about sustainability than the view of triple bottom line. It considers economic, governance, social, ethical, and environmental dimensions of sustainability.

Despite that our work struggled with important limitations, our results show, that these limitations reveal important facts about how the literature not use the new ideas about value creation. This why we opened many new research paths which could have a high impact of future research in sustainability. It can be possible because our limitations are equal with unseen limitations of the literature and these limitations could cause weaknesses of the result of each research.

In a moment when global climate changing has more and more effect to our lives it is important to renew our knowledge about value creation, especially by adopting sustainability dimensions. We hope our work will be visible for all the sustainability researcher to call attention to focus more about how the value creation could be discussed in the future by moving on the last two decades limited developments.

6. REFERENCES

- Alexander, I. K., & Hjortsø, C. N. (2018). Sources of complexity in participatory curriculum development: An activity system and stakeholder analysis approach to the analyses of tensions and contradictions. *Higher Education*, 77(2), 301–322. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-018-0274-x>
- Argandoña, A. (2011). Stakeholder Theory and value creation. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1947317>
- Ayres, R. U. (2008). Sustainability Economics: Where do we stand? *Ecological Economics*, 67(2), 281–310. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2007.12.009>
- Benneworth, P., & Jongbloed, B. W. (2009). Who matters to universities? A stakeholder perspective on Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences Valorisation. *Higher Education*, 59(5), 567–588. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-009-9265-2>
- Clarkson, M. B. (1995). A stakeholder framework for analyzing and evaluating corporate social performance. *The Academy of Management Review*, 20(1), 92. <https://doi.org/10.2307/258888>
- Dahl, R. A. (1957). The concept of power. *Behavioral Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bs.3830020303>
- Donaldson, T., & Preston, L. E. (1995). The Stakeholder Theory of the corporation: Concepts, evidence, and implications. *Academy of Management Review*, 20(1), 65–91. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1995.9503271992>
- Dovers, S. R., & Handmer, J. W. (1992). Uncertainty, sustainability and change. *Global Environmental Change*, 2(4), 262–276. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0959-3780\(92\)90044-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/0959-3780(92)90044-8)
- Dovers, S. R., & Handmer, J. W. (1992). Uncertainty, sustainability and change. *Global Environmental Change*, 2(4), 262–276. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0959-3780\(92\)90044-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/0959-3780(92)90044-8)
- Driscoll, C., & Starik, M. (2004). The primordial stakeholder: Advancing the conceptual consideration of stakeholder status for the natural environment. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 49(1), 55–73. <https://doi.org/10.1023/b:busi.0000013852.62017.0e>
- Elkington, J. (1994). Towards the sustainable corporation: Win-win-win business strategies for Sustainable Development. *California Management Review*, 36(2), 90–100. <https://doi.org/10.2307/41165746>
- Elms, H., Johnson-Cramer, M. E., & Berman, S. L. (n.d.). Bounding the world's miseries: Corporate Responsibility and Freeman's Stakeholder Theory. *Stakeholder Theory*. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9780857936349.00006>
- Ergene, S., Banerjee, S. B., & Hoffman, A. J. (2021). (Un)Sustainability and Organization Studies: Towards a Radical Engagement. *Organization Studies*, 42(8), 1319–1335. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840620937892>
- Eyestone, R. (1979). Politics and the professors: The Great Society in perspective. *The Journal of Politics*, 41(1), 288–290. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2129633>
- Fassin, Y. (2008) The Stakeholder Model Refined. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 84:113–135. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-008-9677-4>
- Freeman, R. E. (1984). *Strategic management: A stakeholder approach*. Pitman.
- Freeman, R. E. (2017). Five challenges to Stakeholder Theory: A report on research in Progress. *Stakeholder Management*, 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1108/s2514-175920170000001>

- Freeman, R. E., Harrison, J. S., Wicks, A. C., Purnell, L., & de Colle, S. (2010). Stakeholder Theory: *the state of the art*. *Academy of Management Annals*, 4(1), 403–445. <https://doi.org/10.5465/19416520.2010.495581>
- Frynas, J. G., & Yamahaki, C. (2016). Corporate Social Responsibility: Review and roadmap of theoretical perspectives. *Business Ethics: A European Review*, 25(3), 258–285. <https://doi.org/10.1111/beer.12115>
- Garvare, R., & Johansson, P. (2010). Management for sustainability – a Stakeholder Theory. *Total Quality Management & Business Excellence*, 21(7), 737–744. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14783363.2010.483095>
- Garvare, R., & Johansson, P. (2010). Management for sustainability – a Stakeholder Theory. *Total Quality Management & Business Excellence*, 21(7), 737–744. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14783363.2010.483095>
- Harrison, J. S., Bosse, D. A., & Phillips, R. A. (2010). Managing for stakeholders, stakeholder utility functions, and competitive advantage. *Strategic Management Journal*, 31(1), 58–74. <https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.801>
- Hart, S. L., & Milstein, M. B. (2003). Creating sustainable value. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 17(2), 56–67. <https://doi.org/10.5465/ame.2003.10025194>
- Hörisch, J., Freeman, R. E., & Schaltegger, S. (2014). Applying Stakeholder Theory in Sustainability Management. *Organization & Environment*, 27(4), 328–346. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1086026614535786>
- Jensen, M. (2001). Value Maximisation, Stakeholder Theory, and the corporate objective function. *European Financial Management*, 7(3), 297–317. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-036x.00158>
- Jhuniar, R. O. S., Johnston, N. G. C., Boaventura, J. M. G., & Barbero, E. R. (2021). Value co-creation within the Stakeholder Theory: taking stock and moving forward. *Revista de Administração da UNIMEP*, 19 (1), 26-50. <http://www.raunimep.com.br/ojs/index.php/rau/article/view/1762/873>
- Liu, L., Zhang, M., Hendry, L. C., Bu, M., & Wang, S. (2017). Supplier development practices for sustainability: A multi-stakeholder perspective. *Business Strategy and the Environment*, 27(1), 100–116. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.1987>
- Mainardes, E. W.; Alves, H.; & Raposo, M. (2011) *Management Decision*. London Vol. 49, Ed. 2, 226-252. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00251741111109133>
- Mitchell, R. K., Agle, B. R., & Wood, D. J. (1997). Toward a theory of stakeholder identification and salience: Defining the principle of who and what really counts. *Academy of Management Review*, 22(4), 853–886. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1997.9711022105>
- Monteiro, G. F. A.; Miranda, B. V.; Rodrigues, V. P.; & Saes, M. S. M. *RAUSP Management Journal*. Vol. 56 No. 4, 2021. pp. 482-487 <https://doi.org/10.1108/RAUSP-06-2021-0121>
- Montiel, I., & Delgado-Ceballos, J. (2014). Defining and measuring corporate sustainability. *Organization & Environment*, 27(2), 113–139. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1086026614526413>
- Pfeffer, J. (1981). *Power in organizations*. Pitman.
- Post, J. E., Preston, L. E., & Sachs, S. (2002). Managing the extended enterprise: The new stakeholder view. *California Management Review*, 45(1), 6–28. <https://doi.org/10.2307/41166151>
- Rees, W. E. (1996). Revisiting carrying capacity: Area-based indicators of sustainability. *Population and Environment*, 17(3), 195–215. <https://doi.org/10.1007/bf02208489>

- Rejeb, A., Rejeb, K. (2020). Blockchain and supply chain sustainability. *Scientific Journal of Logistics*, 16 (3), 363-372. <http://doi.org/10.17270/J.LOG.2020.467>
- Rezaee, Z. (2016). Business Sustainability Research: A theoretical and Integrated Perspective. *Journal of Accounting Literature*, 36(1), 48–64. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acclit.2016.05.003>
- Ribeiro, E., Macambira, M., & Neiva, E. R. (2015). Social network analysis in organizations as a management support tool. *Organizational Psychology and Evidence-Based Management*, 243–265. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-64304-5_13
- Salas-Zapata, W. A., Rios-Osorio, L. A., & Troughon-Osorio, A. L. (2011). Typology of scientific reflections needed for Sustainability Science Development. *Sustainability Science*, 8(4), 607–612. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-012-0183-3>
- Sartori, S., Latrônico, F., & Campos, L. M. S. (2014). Sustentabilidade e Desenvolvimento Sustentável: Uma Taxonomia no Campo da Literatura. *Ambiente & Sociedade*, 17(1), 01–22. <https://doi.org/10.1590/s1414-753x2014000100002>
- Starik, M., & Kanashiro, P. (2013). Toward a theory of Sustainability Management. *Organization & Environment*, 26(1), 7–30. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1086026612474958>
- Starik, M., & Marcus, A. A. (2000). Introduction to the special research forum on the management of organizations in the natural environment: A field emerging from multiple paths, with many challenges ahead. *Academy of Management Journal*, 43(4), 539–547. <https://doi.org/10.5465/1556354>
- Suchman, M. C. (1995). Managing legitimacy: Strategic and institutional approaches. *Academy of Management Review*, 20(3), 571–610. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1995.9508080331>
- Székeley, F., & Knirsch, M. (2005). Responsible leadership and corporate social responsibility: *European Management Journal*, 23(6), 628–647. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2005.10.009>
- van Eck, N. J., & Waltman, L. (2014). CitNetExplorer: A new software tool for analyzing and visualizing Citation Networks. *Journal of Informetrics*, 8(4), 802–823. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.joi.2014.07.006>
- Wartick, S. L., & Mahon, J. F. (1994). Toward a substantive definition of the corporate issue construct. *Business & Society*, 33(3), 293–311. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000765039403300304>
- Weber, M., Parsons, T., & Henderson, A. M. (1947). *The theory of social and economic organization*. Free press & Falcon's Wing press.
- Weiss, A. (1995), “Cracks in the foundations of stakeholder theory”. *Electronic Journal of Radical Organizational Theory*, Vol. 1 No. 1, pp. 1-12.
- Wood, D. J., Mitchell, R. K., Agle, B. R., & Bryan, L. M. (2018). Stakeholder identification and salience after 20 years: Progress, problems, and prospects. *Business & Society*, 60(1), 196–245. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0007650318816522>