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Innovative practices and environmental management: A case study of two industrial groups certified CSR

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Abstract

Environmental protection is widely recognized as one of the three major pillars of Sustainable Development and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). It is seen as a voluntary decision that has become deeply embedded in organizations' strategic choices, investment priorities and financing decisions. This article aims to highlight the main innovative practices in environmental management and protection of natural resources implemented by Moroccan industrial companies labeled CSR, with polluting activities. To achieve this, we have chosen a methodological protocol based on case studies conducted through semi-structured interviews with the executives of two Moroccan industrial groups labeled CSR. Data collection was carried out using an interview guide structured according to the objectives of the study. Through a thematic analysis, we were able to emphasize that these two major industrial groups have implemented a range of innovative practices voluntarily. These practices include the recycling and treatment of wastewater, waste sorting, continuous maintenance and monitoring of Quality, Security and Environnement (QSE) management systems, and adoption of ISO 51000 and ISO 14 001.

Keywords : Innovative practices, environmental management, industrial companies, CSR label, Morocco.

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Résumé

Considéré comme l'un des trois critères majeurs du développement Durable et de la RSE, la protection de l'environnement est considérée comme une décision volontaire qui s'est incrusté dans les choix stratégiques des entreprises, dans leurs choix d'investissement et dans leurs décisions de financement. Cet article a pour objectif de mettre en lumière les principales pratiques innovantes en matière de gestion de l'environnement et de la protection des ressources naturelles mise en place par les entreprises industrielles marocaines labellisées RSE exerçant des activités polluantes. Pour y arriver, nous avons choisi un protocole méthodologique basé sur deux études de cas conduites par le billet des entretiens semi-directifs auprès de deux groupes industriels. Le recueil des données a été réalisé à travers un guide d'entretien structuré en fonction des objectifs de notre étude. A travers une analyse thématique, l'étude nous a permis de souligner que parmi les pratiques innovantes mises en œuvre volontairement par ces deux grands groupes industriels se trouve le recyclage et le traitement des eaux usés, le tri des déchets, le maintien et le suivi des systèmes de management QSE et la mise en place de l'ISO 51000 et l'ISO 14 001.

Mots clés : Pratiques innovantes, management environnemental, entreprises industrielles, label RSE, Maroc

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Introduction

Preserving the environment and promoting sustainable development are two major challenges that local communities and regional development actors must confront. In response to these challenges, companies seek to actively develop strategies and practices to reinforce ecological, social, and economic protection. The Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) label and the ISO 14001 environmental management certificate are two strategies that reflect the voluntary commitment of companies to environmental preservation.

It was not until the 1980s that developed countries became aware that, unlike economic and social aspects, the environment was being overlooked. This indifference endangered the natural resources of present and future generations. To this end, several global organizations have considered universal solutions to protect resources sustainably for future generations.

Despite the proposed solutions and the awareness raised among the risks associated with poor management of natural resources, environmental problems have significantly worsened over the past twenty years. We are currently facing drastic climate change, poor management of water and electricity resources, massive loss of biodiversity, deforestation, desertification, and disruption of the oceanic balance.

Since the Rio Conference in 1992, also known as the Earth Summit, in which King Mohammed VI participated as crown prince, Morocco has been actively involved in sustainable development and environmental preservation through the adoption of a program called Action 21. This program aims to preserve natural resources through the management of water and electricity resources, waste management, and limiting polluting emissions. Morocco has also signed international conventions on climate and biodiversity that were established subsequent to the Summit.

This commitment has been reflected in the development of a National Charter for Environment and Sustainable Development and an integrated action plan formalized in a framework law, following initiatives launched by His Majesty King Mohammed VI in his throne speeches of 2009 and 2010.

Given the current context, the matter of environmental preservation and risk management has become paramount and requires a more in-depth investigation. In line with this objective, this research paper aims to shed light on the innovative practices in environmental management and natural resource protection implemented by Moroccan industrial companies that have been awarded CSR Label.

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To address this objective, we have framed our central research question as follows: "What specific strategies and practices do industrial companies with the CSR label employ to uphold environmental sustainability and mitigate environmental risks?"

To achieve our research objective and answer the central question, our paper is organized into three main sections:

In the first section, we will provide an overview of the key concepts and theories related to environmental management. The second section will clarify our research methodology and the process of data gathering and analysis. In the third section, we will present and analyze the findings of our study, based on the selected case studies. This section will delve into the specific strategies and practices these companies employ to promote environmental sustainability and mitigate environmental risks.

1. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

1.1. Environmental Management from CSR and EMS "Environmental Management System" perspectives

In contemporary business practices, there are various ways in which companies can engage in sustainable development. These include integrating sustainable development values into their strategy, implementing a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiative, or adopting an Environmental Management System (EMS). The preservation and protection of natural resources are among the most pressing global concerns, and the issue was first raised at the Club of Rome meeting in 1960, where members warned of the rapid depletion of natural resources and the urgent need to protect the planet from self-destruction.

It was not until the 1970s that companies started recognizing their responsibility towards natural resources, with the environment becoming an economic value. According to the European Commission, a socially responsible approach must meet several requirements, including integrating environmental concerns into a company's strategy, adopting an environmentally friendly attitude towards changes in the environment, and minimizing the negative effects of its activities. The commission defines CSR as "the voluntary integration by companies of social and environmental concerns into their commercial activities and relationships with stakeholders."

Igalens and Joras (2002) define CSR as respecting the three pillars of the Triple Bottom Line, which encompass environmental, social, and economic concerns. The phrase "People - Planet

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- Profit" is often used to reflect a company's triple performance measured by their contribution to economic prosperity, environmental quality, and social capital.

According to a study conducted by Bouanani El Idrissi and Ladraa (2023), Moroccan companies with CSR labels allocate a portion of their budget to environmental investments, indicating their commitment to preserving and protecting natural resources.

Companies that prioritize a socially responsible approach may express their environmental commitment by implementing an Environmental Management System (EMS) under either the ISO 14001 certificate or the EMAS "Eco-Management and Audit Scheme," also known as SMEA "Environmental Management and Audit System."

The ISO 14001 standard is a reference for EMS, and it was created by the International Organization for Standardization to be adaptable to any type of organization, regardless of the level of stringency of the legislation. The standard aims to engage certified companies in complying with legislation and following the principle of continuous improvement of their results while limiting their impact on the environment.

On the other hand, the EMAS regulation is more demanding than ISO 14001, requiring companies to comply with environmental regulations, meet set improvement objectives, and produce an annual environmental statement for transparency. The regulation also promotes worker participation and places importance on verification by public authorities, with the objective of promoting continuous improvement of environmental results.

1.2.Theoretical frameworks

1.2.1. Stakeholder theory: theory of good management

The stakeholder theory is based on the premise that companies operate in a complex environment comprising multiple actors, each with distinct demands and expectations. These stakeholders wield influence over firms through shareholder activism and transparency, compelling them to adopt socially and environmentally responsible practices.

Freeman (1984) identifies three primary approaches derived from the stakeholder theory to effectively meet stakeholder demands. These are the economic approach, which considers transaction costs between the firm and its stakeholders, the resource-based approach that examines the firm's and stakeholders' resources, and the theory of good management, which links a company's social performance with its management practices.

According to Freeman (1984), companies that produce high-quality products, maintain good relationships with the government, and exhibit concern for the environment, enjoy a positive relationship with their stakeholders, greater competitiveness, and strong financial performance.

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McGuire et al. (1988) support this claim, confirming that good social performance has a positive impact on a company's financial performance.

Bouanani el Idrissi and Ladraa (2023) further substantiate this idea, stating that investing in environmental preservation enables companies to establish in the long term a positive and committed brand image, satisfying stakeholders and outperforming competitors.

1.2.2. Neo-institutional theory

Founded on Selznick's old institutionalism (1949), neo-institutional theory emerged in the mid-1970s, rejecting the model of the rational actor and the "independence" of institutions. Instead, it focuses on cultural and social constraints imposed by the environment on organizations (Selznick. 1996).

Neo-institutional theory defines organizations as "embedded" entities in a social context (Granovetter, 1992; Suchman, 1995), interconnected (Powell and DiMaggio, 1991; Tolbert and Zucker, 1999), and socially constructed by their environment (Berger and Luckmann, 1966).

According to Meyer and Rowan (1977), Stakeholders argue that outside organizations, there exists a set of values, norms, and organizational models that influence their structures and management practices.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices are increasingly being shaped by institutional pressures, including those from civil society organizations and other stakeholders. These pressures vary depending on the institutional environment in which companies operate. As a result, companies often find themselves conforming to institutional rules and expectations to avoid reputational loss.

1.2.3 Porter hypothesis on environmental performance

According to Porter (1991), optimal environmental performance leads to increased productivity, better economic performance, and value creation. This observation was subsequently confirmed by Van Der Lin and Porter (1995), who argued that environmental regulation generates additional costs that can be offset or even exceeded by innovative production processes resulting from innovation efforts, leading to improved productivity and profitability.

1.3.Environmental Management in Morocco: Overview of Implemented Measures and Programs

Morocco has shown a firm commitment to environmental management, acknowledging the urgent need to address the challenges of the 21st century and achieve sustainable development goals for future generations. To achieve this aim, the country has implemented a range of

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measures at the institutional, legal, and strategic levels, and invested in sustainable energy initiatives to conserve natural resources.

At the institutional level, Morocco established a ministry devoted to environmental affairs in 1995, which has been supported by a plethora of governmental administrations and agencies contributing to the nation's sustainable development agenda. Currently, the Ministry of Energy Transition and Sustainable Development is responsible for developing national strategies on environmental protection. Furthermore, the institutional framework was strengthened by the adoption of a new constitution in 2011, which acknowledges sustainable development as a fundamental right for all citizens.

From a legal perspective, the regulatory framework in Morocco has been reinforced since 2003 through the implementation of a series of laws, decrees and regulations that are applicable to industrial companies. This has enabled them to participate in the ongoing dynamic to enhance environmental action in terms of managing natural resources and fighting against pollution caused by industrial waste.

Regarding the strategic dimension, the kingdom has implemented a National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS) in 2017 with the aim of establishing the fundamental the foundational pillars of a green and inclusive economy. However, in June 2021, the National Commission on Sustainable Development recommended redefining the intervention axes of this strategy and their corresponding realization timeline to attain the desired outcomes by 2035. The underlying objective of this revision is to align with the emerging international requirements and best practices relating to biodiversity conservation and climate change mitigation.

In order to align with the global movement and support institutional and regulatory measures, Morocco has embarked on several ecological projects, particularly in the fields of agriculture, industry, water, and electricity. One notable project undertaken by Morocco is the Green Morocco Plan (GMP), launched in 2008, which aimed to modernize the agricultural sector, develop solidarity agriculture, and manage natural resources in a rational and sustainable way. Morocco has also invested in renewable energies through programs for constructing wind farms and photovoltaic solar power plants in various provinces of the country. The objective of these programs is to decrease by a quarter the national energy consumption by 2030. Additionally, other programs have been established to prevent pollution from industrial activities, manage household waste, provide liquid sanitation, and treat wastewater for reuse.

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2. Research methodology and results

To address our research problem of identifying innovative environmental management practices adopted by Moroccan industrial companies certified CSR, we have adopted a qualitative method that will be outlined in this second part.

2.1.Methods

In social sciences, the case study methodology is widely used to examine complex phenomena in real contexts or to deepen knowledge about already studied phenomena. Generally, case studies provide an in-depth and detailed analysis of a limited number of subjects. They can focus on an individual, a group, or an organization by collecting and analyzing life stories, written documents, biographies, interviews, or participant observations (Yin, 2009).

The case study method is not limited to a simple collection of data; it represents a methodological approach that integrates the use of multiple data collection techniques. The obtained data is often exhaustive and offers in-depth analysis. This method is generally considered as a research approach with a mainly qualitative orientation. It focuses on the study of real phenomena and, in opposition to experimental research designs.

The methodological approach of case studies can vary depending on the chosen epistemological orientation. Social sciences traditionally present two major epistemological orientations. The first, advocated by researchers such as Stake (1995) and Merriam (2009), falls within a socio-constructivist or interpretative paradigm. The second, developed by (2009) or Eisenhardt (1989) is more in line with a post-positivist paradigm.

According to Yin (2009), there are different categories of case studies that are chosen depending on the research question and field of study. First, explanatory case studies are used to elucidate causal relationships between complex phenomena. Descriptive case studies, on the other hand, aim to describe a phenomenon and its context. Finally, exploratory case studies are employed to explore a phenomenon of interest to the researcher, in order to discover new causalities and/or results.

In choosing the research design, the researcher must decide between a single case design or multiple case studies, depending on the category of design selected. If the research aims to explore a single case, a research design with a single case may be adequate. However, if the objective is to understand a phenomenon for generalization, it is more appropriate to study multiple cases.

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Moreover, multiple case studies comprise several individual cases as units of analysis, which can be holistic cases or embedded cases. According to Yin (2009), the use of multiple case studies must follow replication rather than statistical sampling, and each case must be carefully selected to lead to similar results (literal replication) or contrasted but for previously known reasons (theoretical replication).

For our article, we have opted for a multiple case study. We chose this because of its ability to explore and compare several cases simultaneously. This methodology allows for an in-depth analysis of each individual case, while also allowing for an understanding of the similarities and differences between these two companies, as well as the strategies implemented to address environmental challenges.

Furthermore, this method allows for a holistic analysis taking into account various aspects of the two companies studied, such as their strategic approaches, their relationships with stakeholders, their environmental and social impact, as well as the innovative environmental management practices and natural resource protection implemented by MANAGEM and MENARA PREFA.

To analyze the data we collected, we employed a thematic technique. This involved identifying key themes and categorizing the information gathered from interviews and discussions with the companies.

2.2.Presentation of Companies

To carry out our qualitative study, we selected two leading companies in the Marrakesh region: MANAGEM and MENARA PREFA. This selection was made due to their importance in the Moroccan industrial sector, as well as their significant presence in the Marrakesh region.

2.2.1MENARA PREFA

MENARA Préfa is a Moroccan company specialized in the production and distribution of prefabricated concrete products. Since its inception in 1996, the company has quickly gained a reputation as a leader in the prefabricated products market in Morocco. MENARA PREFA offers a range of products, including façade elements, slabs, beams, columns, and prefabricated walls, and boasts a modern and well-equipped 14,000 square meter factory located in Marrakech. The company leverages state-of-the-art equipment and innovative manufacturing techniques to produce high-quality products that meet international standards.

MENARA PREFA is also known for its expertise in the design and implementation of turnkey projects for various sectors, such as residential, commercial, industrial, and infrastructure

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projects. Through close collaboration with its clients, the company customized effective solutions to meet their specific needs. MENARA PREFA is committed to quality and environmentally friendly management systems, which comply with international standards. It reflects in its ISO 9001 and ISO 14001 certifications.

The company is also involved in initiatives to reduce its environmental impact and promote sustainable development. Thanks to its technical expertise and unwavering commitment to quality and customer service, MENARA PREFA has established a strong reputation and loyal customer base in Morocco and beyond.

2.2.3 MANAGEM

MANAGEM is a Moroccan company specialized in the exploration, extraction, and marketing of precious metals. The company was established in 1930 and has since become a leading actor in the mining sector in Morocco. It operates in various regions, including Guemassa, Akka, Bou-Azzer, and Tizert, where it mines a range of metals, including gold, silver, copper, zinc, and others. In addition, MANAGEM is listed on both the Casablanca Stock Exchange and the Toronto Stock Exchange, indicating its significant position in the market.

Al Mada, a private Pan-African investment fund, is MANAGEM's primary shareholder. The partnership between the two companies aims to develop collaborative mining projects and explore new investment opportunities in the sector. This joint venture is aligned with MANAGEM's growth strategy and serves to consolidate its position as a prominent mining entity in Africa and beyond. MANAGEM also operates in other African countries, such as Ivory Coast, Gabon, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Sudan. The company's commitment to compliance with environmental and social standards is reflected in its involvement in community projects, such as the construction of schools and health centers, to improve the living conditions of local populations.

3. Results and discussions

Positioned at the heart of the sustainable development issue, all companies, regardless of their activity, are major consumers of natural resources and contributors to environmental degradation through their waste emissions. It was only from the 1990s that the issue of environmental preservation became a priority for all companies, but more specifically for industrial companies due to the direct impact of their activity on the environment.

Our study focused on exploring innovative practices implemented by two Moroccan industrial groups that have the particularity of being certified as CSR by the CGEM. In the following, we

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will highlight the practices of each of the two companies, and then synthesize and discuss the results obtained.

3.1.Innovative environmental practices of Ménara Préfa

Considered an undisputed leader in the raw materials BTP sector in the Marrakech-Safi region, the large concrete plant Ménara Préfa, like any industrial enterprise, contributes to environmental pollution through the pollution derived from the use of machines, mixers, trucks, as well as toxic emissions in the air such as dust, machine exhaust smoke, and its massive consumption of water in its main activity of concrete pouring, which is managed through a maintenance and recycling system.

In addition to being CSR certified and ISO 14001 certified for environmental management, Ménara Préfa has an integrated QSE (Quality, Safety, Environment) management system and is ISO 51000 certified for energy management systems aimed at more efficient energy use and continuous improvement in consumption. The management systems have been planned and integrated gradually step by step since 2011/2012. The budget variable is very important as the progress of investments depends on it.

Like any organization, Ménara Préfa seeks to make its investment profitable. According to classical economic theory, pollution caused by companies generates an additional cost called negative "externality". This will prevent the achievement of Pareto's equilibrium and generate inequalities due to the transfer of costs. According to our interviewee, the more profitable the investment, the more the company seeks to integrate new environmental aspects.

To address these environmental challenges, several innovative processes and practices have been put in place:

- Adoption of an internal and external communication system on environmental issues and planned actions for environmental protection;
- Sorting of waste from support activities of the company;
- Treatment and recycling of waste from its main activity, namely the production of construction materials;
- Water is a very important resource for the company's activity, and therefore, it is optimally managed and treated in a recycling station where the basins are renewed every 20 days. The company also has a laboratory for monitoring and quality control.
- Integration of renewable energies through the installation of photovoltaic panels to optimize its energy consumption,

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- Product certification;
- Minimization of paper usage through the installation of software that allows the storage and classification of files in electronic folders.

The involvement and dialogue with the company's stakeholders is essential for the success of the environmental projects and investments. This commitment is reflected in the quality of contracts with clients, suppliers, and subcontractors.

Regarding complaints and claims from stakeholders, they are treated differently, and each complaint is resolved with actions that have impacts allowing the improvement of certain deficiencies of the company.

In short, the consideration of environmental issues within Ménara Préfa is managed by the QSE management, which ensures the execution of projects and the implementation of good environmental practices.

3.2.Innovative environmental practices of Managem

Committed to a sustainable development project and a CSR approach, the Managem mining group is committed to reconciling profitability and socially responsible actions, including environmental commitment, which is considered a major axis of the group's global sustainable development strategy.

Managem adopts an environmental preservation policy focused mainly on wastewater recycling, waste storage and recovery management, the reduction of toxic emissions and the integration of renewable energies in their daily management.

By integrating environmental constraints and risks upstream, Managem has opted a proactive approach that takes into consideration the environmental dimension in the management of its mining sites through training and awareness-raising of personnel, the development of action plans focused on environmental preservation, the implementation of a monitoring and control system for industrial processes, and finally the adoption of an environmental management system that meets the requirements of ISO 14001 standard. As a result, seven MANAGEM sites are now certified to the ISO 14001 standard and the others are in the certification phase.

In this same logic, the group has implemented several innovative practices with the aim of protecting and preserving the ecology:

- The recovery of Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) from electronic cards of computers, cell phones, television ... into copper ingots in the processing plants at the site of Guemassa, thus participates in creating a circular economy.

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- Recycling mining waste to create alternative raw materials and clean energy.
- The setting up of a pyrrhotite roasting unit which will allow the recovery of sulphur and iron-based mining waste into sulphuric acid and iron oxide, thus generating green electricity.
- Creation of a Reminex research and development center with the objective of supporting the group's activities throughout the value chain. The aim is to ensure product quality, resource optimization and environmental protection.
- Production of trace elements from ores produced by management in partnership with the Agronomic and Veterinary Institute (IAV).
- Rationalization of water consumption by maximizing the percentage of recycled water that will be used in its treatment processes;

For its energy efficiency, the company has implemented projects to integrate new sources of clean energy. Today, 63% of the Group's electricity consumption comes from its own energy.

This environmental preservation policy is a joint decision of all stakeholders for which the company allocates a significant budget in order to control the industrial, social and environmental risks related to the group's activities. As for the complaints and grievances received, Managem deals with them individually and takes them into account in its future strategy to carry out its social responsibility.

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Conclusion

The study conducted within two compagnies: MANAGEM and MENARA HOLDING Groups through its subsidiary MENARA PREFA reveals that all industrial companies must commit to an environmental protection approach in view of the negative impact of their activities on the environment.

Indeed, our two companies have the same vision of reconciling economic and social progress with the preservation of the environment. They have complied with international requirements relating to the preservation of the environment, and this through their CSR label awarded by the General Confederation of Moroccan Companies in addition to the implementation of various environmental management systems represented in the form of ISO 14001 certificate relating to environmental management and ISO 51000 relating to the energy management system.

The two groups have developed a policy of preservation of natural resources focused mainly on:

- Recycling of wastewater: Being an important resource for the activity of both companies, water is recycled and reused in their activities.
- Waste recycling and storage: The waste from the production activity is sorted according to a classification, recycled, and reused.

The creation of the "Reminex" research center by the Managem Group has been of great added value in transforming ecological constraints into economic opportunities. The group was able to benefit from the recycling of electrical and electronic equipment to make it a source of energy and income for the company. To do this, the group has created a plant whose sole activity is the recycling of operating waste and the treatment of wastewater.

As for Ménara Préfa, an entire department called "Quality Safety Environment Department" was created to manage, execute and follow up on the environmental projects set up.

The integration of the environmental management systems has been in a progressive way according to the budget allocated by each company. Nevertheless, the objective is the same for both groups: to comply with global regulations, to manage environmental risk through the adoption of strategies to mitigate the impact of their activities on the environment, and finally to anticipate changes through the adoption of adaptation policies and the integration of new technologies to improve the ecological and economic environment of companies.

In order to face the environmental challenges, both groups have implemented an internal communication strategy by establishing training and awareness programs for the staff, and an

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external communication with suppliers and subcontractors on the issues and actions planned by the company.

All in all, the concern for the preservation of the environment is an issue of growing concern in view of the negative impact of industrial activities on climate change, the loss of biodiversity, the pollution of the earth and the degradation of natural resources. Aware of this, companies are nowadays aiming to be part of a societal responsibility perspective emphasizing its three aspects: economic, social and environmental, as well as the integration of systems to predict and manage environmental risk in order to optimize the exploitation of natural resources and limit the effects of its business activities on nature.

Our work is not discounted for methodological limitations that may present avenues for development. The two interviews carried out with the two industrial groups are of an exploratory nature and cannot claim to be generalized, hence the need to deepen our study through:

- A longitudinal study that will allow apprehending more closely the innovative practices in environmental management implemented by the studied companies;
- The multiplication of the studied cases to detect new practices set up by the companies operating in the industrial sector;
- Diversification of the studied sectors in order to discover new practices adapted to the particularities of the said sectors.

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