2

SUSTAINABLE ETHICAL DECISION MAKING IN GROUPS: GUIDELINES FOR OPERATIONALISING A PROPOSAL BY JÜRGEN HABERMAS

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Abstract: This paper offers a new perspective on decision-making and presents a process that can lead to sustainable ethical decisions. An operational definition is proposed for sustainable ethical decisions that are technically solvent, ethically responsible, and shared by the stakeholders involved. After an analysis of scholarly literature – from the Business Ethics as well as the management science perspective – in order to understand this process, serious limitations are found when decision-making is circumscribed only within the realm of an individual, which therefore indicates a need to transpose these ethical decisions to another level of analysis: the group. From there, accepting Adorno's critique of the violence that any human group can commit against itself, Habermas' communicative proposal is presented as the basis upon which the decision-making process can be structured. This paper presents two methods that are based on complexity science and operationalise a

previous theoretical discussion on processes that lead to sustainable ethical decisions.

Keywords: ethical decision-making, sustainability, group decision, sustainable decision, Adorno, Habermas, complexity science, world cafe, DIAD

There is an ever-growing consensus around the need to advance towards a more sustainable model of businesses and organisations (Pfeffer, 2010). We take the most widely accepted definition of the concept "*sustainable*" to be the one proposed in 1987 by the World Commission on Environment and Development of the United Nations and outlined in the "Brundtland Report." The term *sustainable* was defined there as that which "satisfies the needs of the current generations without compromising the possibilities of future generations to attend to their own needs as well."

Given that since its inception the concept of sustainability has been circumscribed within the environmental field, there is a certain bias on the part of businesses when developing sustainable business models, focusing mainly on preventing environmental consequences rather than any others. Wilkinson, Hill & Gollan (2001) is an example of this bias focus while they dedicate most of their paper to environmental effects and only address other areas of management in the conclusion. Likewise, Marcus and Remeth (2009) find empirical evidence for the existing enthusiasm in society for what they come to term "green management", that is, a social interest in seeing how executives will direct their companies while protecting the environment. In a similar vein, Bansal (2002), and Ambec and Lanoie (2008, p. 46) note that "firms are facing growing pressure to become greener".

Pfeffer (2010) highlights the need to widen the concept of sustainability that is applied to organizations to include more than environmental concerns. This has begun to happen slowly: Vuontisjärvi (2006), referencing Elkington's work (1994) on the triple-bottom-line (economic, social and environmental), suggests several avenues of exploration along these lines. In the same way, Hart y Milstein (2003) point to the need to consider long-term sustainability from the stockholder's point of view. More recently, Lawler y Worley (2011) emphasise how strategy, government,

organisational design and talent should be managed within the parameters of sustainability.

This paper aims to make a contribution along these lines by digging deeper into the manager's task *par excellence*: decision-making. Specifically, we will examine decisions that have ethical implications; these range from decisions that a manager makes in the course of a day, like the dilemma between short-term goals linked to a personal bonus and a choice that is more favourable to the company in the long-term, decisions that can affect multiple stakeholders; as well as innumerable decisions and situations described and analysed in the literature (Ashforth, Gioia, Robinson & Trevino, 2008), and even the great scandals of recently past years like Enron, Goldman Sachs and many others.

SUSTAINABLE ETHICAL DECISION-MAKING

In order to achieve the objective of this paper, we must determine what is meant by a sustainable ethical decision. Towards this end, a bibliographic search was conducted so as to ascertain what scientific consensus exists on this topic[1]. Upon review of the paltry literature discovered on the topic, the conclusion reached is that no consensus exists as yet. For example, the works of Kunsch, Theys and Brans (2007), Hersh (1999) and Fox, Tost and Wade-Benzoni (2010) exemplify the lack of consensus reached with regard to what should be considered a sustainable ethical decision, or more recently, Bastons and Armengou (2017) confirm, almost ten years later, that consensus has not been reached yet.

Given this fact, we have opted to offer an operational definition of the term "sustainable ethical decision," which does not pretend to be normative whatsoever. For the purposes of this paper, a sustainable ethical decision shall be considered one which is technically solvent (that is, one that meets the requirements of the definition presented in the Brundtland

[1] On 26th March 2018, a search was conducted in the ISI Web of Knowledge - Social Science Citation Index database, applying the following search strategy: topic "sustainable decision-making" & "ethic*". The results only found eight entries, two of which were Proceedings presented at congresses, and only six were papers published in an indexed journal. Carrying out the same search in the ABI-Inform database (ProQuest), seventeen papers were found, apparently related to this subject matter, four of which bore no relation to the subject of this paper, and another one was the paper mentioned previously in the search described above. Hence, the body of academic articles to review is limited to fourteen.

Report), ethically responsible (that is, one that has been analysed in the light of pertinent ethical principles) and shared by the affected or involved stakeholders, given that despite the apparent consensus that could appear to exist regarding certain decisions of an ethical nature, empirical evidence suggests that this is not necessarily the case (Flynn & Wiltermuth, 2010), and therefore, that this lack of consensus leads, sooner or later, to a necessary questioning of the content of the decision and limitations on its sustainability.

MAKING ETHICAL CHOICES

A great interest in studying ethical decision-making can be discovered within the scientific community researching Business Ethics starting years ago. A good example of this are the more than 60 papers collected by Ford and Richardson (1994) in their review of the literature on this topic, which covers research performed from the end of the 70s to the beginning of the 90s. Similarly, O'Fallon and Butterfield conducted a scholarly review (2005) that covers research conducted between 1996 and 2003, in which they examined 174 articles. Both the review published in 1994 and that published in 2005 emphasise that most of the existing research focuses on individual decision making, that is, the study of factors such as age, nationality, gender, personality, religion, educational level, level of commitment to the organisation, or work status, among others.

LIMITATIONS OF AN INDIVIDUAL FOCUS ON DECISION-MAKING

Other lines of work run parallel to all this research without contradicting it; they manifest the limitations of the decision making process when carried out by only one individual. Examples of this are Paxton's studies (Paxton, Ungar & Greene 2012) regarding the limitation presented by studying the process as a purely rational one, when empirical evidence exists to prove the importance of psychological factors that compel us to make decisions on the basis of other, not purely rational criteria. This fact has been studied and categorised in much more depth by Klein (2009), who concludes that the decision-making process should be examined

through a new lens: one that surpasses the paradigm in which this process is described as an exclusively rational matrix, and tries to include in its explanatory models other variables which are known to be critical.

In this way, for example, many empirical studies gather strength. Clothed in the concept of bounded rationality, they demonstrate that individuals, when confronted with ethical decisions, make their choices "automatically," such that individual preferences–that are not the product of a purely rational analysis–tend to introduce some bias in the decision-making. In this sense, Banaji and Bahaskar (2000) have demonstrated the importance that stereotypes end up having when decisions are made automatically; or how we tend to favor those that are closer to us when making decisions that concern them (Banaji, Bazerman, & Chugh, 2003); or how we are able to opt, almost unconsciously, for non-ethical behaviours during a process of negotiation in order to achieve the established objectives (Kern & Chugh, 2009).

All these studies are consistent with the work of Haidt (2001), who maintains that moral and ethical decisions are made, predominantly, intuitively, by using one's capacity for discernment as the tool to justify said decision, and not, by and large, to improve the choice from an ethical standpoint. In this same line we find the work of Banaji, Bazerman and Chugh (2003) and of Wade-Benzoni, Okumura, Brett, Moore, Tenbrunsel and Bazerman (2002). Among other works that support this hypothesis, we find those of Jones (1991), Morris and McDonald (1995) and Flannery and May (2000); they affirm that an one tends to ignore the impact of her decisions on others, unless the topic at hand carries such ethical weight as to force her to recognise the ethical implications of the decision.

GROUP EFFECT ON DECISION-MAKING

From all this, it is established that individual decision-making carries a series of limitations that, while not obvious, clearly can affect the results of the process and lead to a decision that does not necessarily address the criteria for a sustainable ethical decision mentioned above.

Faced with all these limitations in the individual decision-making process, the scientific community has identified possible approaches to a solution. Indeed, the clearest approach is to transfer the decision-making from an individual to a group dimension. In this fashion, even though

the aforementioned biases still exist, it is to be expected that they will be compensated for and, thus, a better decision will be made. The positive ature of group effects, and the increased quality of the decision that groups make has been thoroughly demonstrated in scholarly literature (Sniezek & Henry, 1990; Cohen & Bailey, 1997; Forsyth, 2009). Likewise, for example, Furnham (2001) lists some of the reasons why a group is capable of making better decisions than isolated individuals are: the group can harness a greater number of resources and has a superior capacity to process all the information; it can opt to establish specialised tasks and can include specialists in the process; it holds a richer diversity of points of view and therefore can better compare and contrast the quality of the arguments presented; and the much-observed effects of social facilitation[2] can come into play.

On the other hand, scholarly literature has also documented the associated costs of group decision-making, which run from the necessary large investment of time to all types of problems associated with dysfunctional group behaviour, such as social loafing[3], group-thinking[4], or the perverse effect whereby the existence of a diversity of opinions degenerates into conflict rather than being a source of richness for the group (Forsyth, 2009).

To all this we must add yet another section of empirical evidence that points out that groups, at times, are faced with the challenge of contributing their complete potential, which can lead sometimes to a relinquishing of responsibility by the group as a whole towards its more capable members (Bion, 1961). This tends to be the case when the group must confront complex tasks (Hill, 1982). As such, it seems that the groups arrive at a compromised decision heavily influenced by their most prominent members (Sniezek & Henry, 1989).

This evidence largely supports the conclusions drawn from the few empirical studies that have been performed regarding ethical group decision-making. Namely, Nichols and Day (1982), Abdolmohammadi,

[2] *Social facilitation* refers to the process by which the mere presence of other peers in certain circumstances has an energising effect that can produce superior results (Furnham, 2001).

[3] *Social loafing* refers to the decrease in individual participation or personal contribution to a group that results when the contribution of each member cannot be identified by the group (Forsyth, 2009).

[4] *Groupthinking* refers to a process whereby a very cohesive group can exert significant pressure on its members to give up their individual process of reflection and agree to the group's operative hypothesis, generating a uniform and accepted response by all (Janis,1972).

Gabhart, and Reeves (1997), Abdolmohammadi and Reeves (2003), and more recently, O'Leary and Pangeman (2007) have concluded that group decision-making does not give the best solution to the ethical dilemma at hand because many times the more dominant members (who are not necessarily the most qualified ones) end up imposing their point of view, or the group exerts such pressure on its members that the group-thinking effect takes over and the members of the group decide to maintain a more neutral position instead of choosing to defend their individual standpoint. In this way, those members avoid both conflict and being singled out by the more influential leaders. This means that the group is able to arrive at a "consensus" on the decision that must be made, although it may not be the "best" solution to the dilemma at hand.

THEODOR ADORNO'S POINT OF VIEW

The empirical studies mentioned above were carried out according to social psychology and management science and their conclusions largely agree with the ideas laid out decades earlier by Theodor Adorno. One of the most notable figures in the Frankfurt School, this philosopher designed a line of thinking that attempted to highlight the impossibility of achieving unity within a system without committing violence.

Theodor Adorno grounds his critical reading of society on the framework of "negative dialectics," a non-systematic model or manner of thinking and philosophising about dynamic and complex social issues. In Adorno's own words, "negative dialectics" can be categorised as anti-systematic since it aims to substitute the principle of unity and the all-powerful reach of the "idea" for that which escapes its power (Adorno, 2005, p. 10): difference, particularity. Remember that Adorno's dialectics and objectives are Hegelian. For the idealistic philosopher, a ternary dialectics composed of successive contradictions (thesis and antithesis) and a resultant resolution (overcoming synthesis) can be applied to reality. In Hegel's view, such a process takes place continuously (said synthesis is followed by a new antithesis, and so on, and so on) until a final point in which there can no longer be any contradiction: universality itself.

For Adorno, on the other hand, the universal must be rejected because, among other things, not even the universal concept of "particularity" holds power over the actual particular to which it refers (Adorno, 2005, p. 166). Negative dialectics is "dialectics" insofar as it forms part of the

contradictory character of human nature, and "negative" insofar as it focuses its efforts on realising a negative critique of given positivity, and "negative dialectics" such that it is a way of proceeding that resolves the ultimate non-identity between subject and object, thinking and reality (Barahona, 2009, p. 205).

For example, let us think about the concept of *racial or national community/group*, an idea used as an instrument of hierarchy and social division that is born, not coincidentally, in the heart of modern society. In fact, it is no surprising that the concept of race turns out to be one of the pillars of the Nazi ideology with its resultant exclusion, to the extreme of annihilation, of the Other. In his *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno connects the desire for "unity" and the metaphysics of hierarchy that presuppose the humanitarian breakdown that Auschwitz represents, which, he insists, is no accident of modernity, but a consequence of the very form and structure of its system (Adorno, 2005, 332). Genocide is the ultimate consequence of the levelling of subjects and their integration into *one* pattern, which is indifferent to any positive difference. The absoluteness of the spirit, aureole of culture and its pride, he notes, is the principle that repeatedly violates the very freedom that is purports. Therefore, Auschwitz is the symbol of the failure of culture and spirit (of modernity) that it accompanies (Adorno, 2005, p. 336). Everything returns to the system, to metaphysics, to the category; it is the return to the one-voicedness and the danger of the uniform, to the reduction of the multiplicity of humanity, of the Other, to mere exclusionary objectivity.

As a counterpoint to the idea of "unity", Adorno introduces the "constellation" concept (borrowed from W. Benjamin) as a form of reading, of interpretation–not of explanation–of the constitution of the object. Instead of attempting to reduce the diversity and ineffability of an experience, or of difference, to an objective, proper and formal unity, Adorno advocates for a greater awareness of the process by which the object has acquired that which constitutes it (Adorno, 2005, p. 158) (think, for example, of the constitution of a national community and all the challenges and conflicts that develop it, which in many cases continue to be present in its historical dynamics).

Each of the references to meaning and significance would become a reflection of the world that surrounds it, such that in its development as convergent, the existential configuration that circumscribes it would be included as well. In this way, the phenomenon is explained by the configurations, by the plurality of the "concept bunches" that surround it,

whose total is precisely the *constellation* (Barahona, 2009, p. 225).

In addition to what has been mentioned, Theodor Adorno's ethical proposal includes a highly interesting perspective in the process of making sustainable ethical decisions, that is, a reference to the memory of past wrongs.

The Adornian proposal has been defined as a reminiscent ethics, wherein the fundamental imperative is to remember the barbarity and the victims' suffering. Some researchers have developed such an ethical perspective in this country (Spain), as does Manuel Reyes Mate in *The Memory of the Defeated,* or José María Mardones. From this perspective, history is neither a fatality nor a mechanical process, rather the fruit of human decisions articulated in the past. To be conscious of the devastating effect that such decisions had for many human collectives is fundamental as a prudent principle in the present.

The requirement to remember and to evoke the suffering of the humiliated is essential in current decision-making. In the well-known radio conference of 1968 entitled *Education After Auschwitz,* Theodor Adorno highlights that the fundamental demand of all educational practices is that Auschwitz never happen again. This material and historical imperative has universal value for Adorno although it does not emerge from purely practical reason. It is an imperative imprinted upon our memory that cannot be founded on something previous in the same fashion. This imperative is, in his judgment, elemental and *a priori* to any other one.

When making decisions in the heart of a community, whether political, social or economic, the memory of what happened and of the suffering of the victims should be emphatically evoked in order to avoid similar situations in the present or in the future as a consequence of the present decisions being made. Adorno's contribution has not been sufficiently considered in the area of organisational ethics. His reflection on negative dialectics is an antidote to any form of totalisation or homogenisation and his reminiscent ethics is a call to evoke the memory of evil so that decision-making of the present be more than just prudent: also dignified.

THE HEURISTIC PROPOSAL OF JÜRGEN HABERMAS

Against the pessimism of Adorno to the dialectical discrepancy that only can be solved through homogenization, Habermas raises the pos-

sibility of being able to find in the discrepancy itself some common aspects that will allow to establish a dialogue. The work of Jürgen Habermas attempts to crack apart modernity's project of universal emancipation. According to Innes and Booher (2010) the emancipatory knowledge comes through a dialectical process. This dialectic allows knowers to grasp the many-sidedness of reality and get a sense of the whole, while being aware of contradictions. Dialectic never achieves stasis, it is always comprised in a dynamic of evolving views continually confronting one another. In a well-managed collaborative dialogue, participants can challenge each other's assumptions and force self-reflection, integrating discrepancies.

In fact, for Habermas, every new step in the criticism of ideologies and instrumental reason denotes a radicalisation of the criticism of reason, and effected, precisely, according to the principle of the emancipating power of reason. As such, Habermas understands that Adorno's critique of the processes of rationalisation can be explained by the same illustrated desire of philosophy and its reach, thus achieving the universal project of rational, illustrated emancipation.

In this sense, Habermas' proposal to provide a basis for morality comes to bear on the formal quality of its validity, that is, on the fact that it shares a common structure: the *structure of communication*. This structure implicitly recognises, as well: the right to participate in a community of communication, whether to offer or counter a given position; the right to an equal ability to express opinions, desires and needs; and the right not to be coerced. The last resource establishes a generalising principle that acts as a measurement of the argument that stems from its proposal and seeks, through its development, the implied ethics in the relationship with the Other (Habermas, 1983). In this way, the ethics that Habermas proposes is a discursive ethics that serves as a procedure, as *the discursive proof of the pretensions of validity* (Habermas, 1983, p. 128) that is based on the rationality of the participants.

In other words, for Habermas, rationality necessarily involves a common and universal structure which is what allows for the consolidation of an ethical discourse community.

In keeping with Habermas, we must bear in mind that all pragmatics intended to create a common space for communication must include (Habermas, 1983):

- An orientation that delves deeper into understanding than success, since the opposite would privilege the interest in achieving an "end" over communicative agreement, if that were to be required.
- The establishment of coordinated processes adopted by free approval and without community coercion.
- An awareness of the "lived world" of the speakers and the need to transcend it in order to arrive at a shared "lived world." "Lived world" should be taken to mean the intuitively previously-known context of the realm of action. Meaning, the context is what allows for interpretation and interaction based on the effects of a determined action.
- Communicative action geared towards understanding, requiring that such communication should be real and adjusted to community principles that are sincere and mutually-agreed upon .
- A consciousness of the complexity that is implied undertaking a decentralisation of the world in order to give way to a progressive assumption of group dynamics in which the individually assumed backgrounds of the "lived worlds" of its members will converge.

If the need to operationalise a hypothesis for action within the context of ethically sustainable decisions is considered imperative–and, in that case, if Habermas' proposal is understood to abide by those criteria-, the resulting decision will be, at least, adopted and shared by the group. Since, as Habermas himself indicates, communicative actions should be adjusted to the agreed-upon community principles, in order to be an ethically sustainable decision, this principle should be adopted by all the community ("*common-unity*"*)*. Indeed, this is the first foundational pillar of ethically sustainable decisions.

In addition, if this dialogue has met the criteria that Habermas identifies: intelligibility, truth, rightness and veracity, the result will be ethically responsible (that is, it will be able to respond to the reason for its effectiveness), the second of the pillars described above on this paper.

Finally, if all the critical players in this decision-making process are participating in the process, and all of them act in agreement with the cited principles of rightness and veracity, the effect of the decisions should be technically solvent, since all the knowledge necessary for decision making will be present, and in addition, all the players will be behaving correctly and truthfully.

OPERATIONALISING JÜRGEN HABERMAS' AND THEODOR ADORNO'S PROPOSAL

One criticism of the Habermas' proposal points to the impossibility of mutual recognition based solely on reason. It is not merely that rationality could not likely be one and the same in all human beings, but also that it is improbable that equal recognition between counterparts be made strictly through rationality. Richard Rorty supports this with a pragmatic perspective that deals precisely with the desire to construct an ethical relationship rationally (Rorty, 1979).

Faced with the impossibility of true recognition among equals as the product of the asymmetry of power in any organizational context (Pfeffer, 2010), we would like to suggest two methods that would, in fact, promote the cancellation of any type of dominant power through a specific decision-making design that allows for the application of Habermas' proposal.

A FIELD FOR GROUNDING THE OPERATIONALISATION OF A PROPOSAL BY ADORNO AND HABERMAS: COMPLEXITY SCIENCE

In order to achieve that purpose one of the most productive fields that should be explored is systems theory and, specifically, complexity science (Merali & Allen, 2011). The term complexity science refers to "the scientific study of systems with many interacting parts that exhibit a global behaviour not reducible to the interactions between the individual constituent parts (or agents)" (Thietart & Forgues, 2011). According to Cillies (1998), some of the characteristics of complex systems are that they produce a rich interaction, any element in the system can influence or be influenced by any other, interactions are nonlinear and typically short-range, and there are positive and negative feedback loops of interactions. By deduction, we see that, if a system can be designed and functions under complex conditions, many of the requirements suggested by Habermas will be fulfilled. Furthermore, given the existence of local interactions that lead to a higher order result being generated by the system (consensus), the level of violence between agents will be lower, tending towards zero, so that the violence described and indicated by Adorno as a constituent part of social relations can be very significantly reduced.

Two methods were proven that generate a social system that works under the premises of a complex adaptive system. The DIAD method was proven by Innes & Booher (2010), and the World Café by Brown & Isaacs (2005), and Correa (2012).

Both methods can create the needed interaction in a way that reduces the level of violence among agents as requested by Adorno. In both methods there is no central system that controls the information flow; rather, the group itself is transformed into a network of interactions where information is exchanged and heuristics and shared meanings are developed, which lead to shared decisions that are the fruits of the creation of new responses (Booher & Innes, 2002). These types of networks can adapt to different existing environments and the demands therein, achieving a high level of effectiveness without any need for central control (Cilliers, 1998). These methods assume the abovementioned premises and allow their operationalization in a specific group process.

ADORNO AND HABERMAS, AND THE DIAD AND WORLD CAFÉ PROCESSES

A table below shows the relationship between the three dimensions of ethical and sustainable decisions described above: namely, technical solvency, ethical responsibility, and participation by the stakeholders involved. The table shows the contributions made by Adorno and Habermas, and the relationship with the two processes presented (DIAD and World Café) that explains how the use of these processes leads to sustainable and ethical decision-making.

Both methods are based on a set of design principles that ensure ethical and sustainable decisions. As can be seen in the table, along with the original design principles, various small adjustments have been suggested to ensure that both methods comply with the arguments presented by Habermas and Adorno.

The table has been structured from those three dimensions: technical solvency; ethical responsibility; and participation by the stakeholders. Both methods are based on the premise that the group decision-making process must involve key stakeholders and everyone involved – as well as those with the knowledge required to make technically solvent decisions. When applying this principle, together with the criteria presented

by Adorno and Habermas, the resulting decisions may be considered ethical and sustainable.

DIAD DESIGN PRINCIPLES

This deliberative process, as presented by the authors Innes & Booher (2010), is built on three design principles:

- *Diversity of interest*: according to the authors, "condition of diversity implies that a collaboratively rational process must include not only agents who have power because they are 'deal makers' or 'deal breakers', but also those who have needed information or could be affected by outcomes of the process. This condition is consistent with Habermas' idea of communicative rationality in its requirement for inclusion of all perspectives" (p. 36).
- *Interdependence of interest*: "The condition of interdependence holds that agents must depend to a significant degree on other agents in a reciprocal way. That is, each has something the others want. This condition helps ensure that participants will maintain the interest and energy to engage with each other throughout the process and have the incentive to reach agreement" (p. 36).
- Authentic dialogue: "Agents must engage with each other on a shared task in deliberation characterised by engagement among agents so that they can mutually assure that their claims are legitimate, accurate, comprehensible and sincere" (p.36).

WORLD CAFÉ DESIGN PRINCIPLES

The World Café method as designed by its authors (Brown & Isaacs, 2005) is based on the following principles, ideas, and practices:

- *Set the context*: "Clarify the purpose and broad parameters within which the dialogue will unfold" (p.40).
- *Create hospitable space:* "Ensure the welcoming environment and psychological safety that nurtures personal comfort and mutual respect" (p.40).

- *Explore questions that matter*: "Focus collective attention on powerful questions that attract collaborative engagement" (p.40).
- *Encourage everyone's contribution*: "Enliven the relationship between the 'me' and the 'we' by inviting full participation and mutual giving" (p.40).
- *Cross-pollinate and connect diverse perspectives*: "Use the living-system dynamics of emergence through intentionally increasing the diversity and density of connections among perspectives while retaining a common focus on core questions" (p.40).
- *Listen together for patterns, insights, and deeper questions*: "Focus shared attention in ways that nurture coherence of thought without losing individual contributions" (p.40).
- *Harvest and share collective discoveries*: "Make collective knowledge and insight visible and actionable" (p.40).

From these principles, each of the methods establishes how to proceed to make them reality. The empirical evidence contributed to date shows how to follow the procedures mentioned and the design principles are evident. From there it follows that by introducing the nuances presented in the table for each of the methods, the result will be an ethical and sustainable decision.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this paper has been to offer a different gaze at ethical decision-making in order to make this process sustainable.

After proving the lack of scholarly consensus regarding the meaning of "sustainable ethical decision-making", we proposed an operative definition that affirms that such decisions should be technically solvent, ethically responsible and shared by all the stakeholders involved.

We documented as well the problems associated with individual decision-making, pointing out the possible biases that can come into play. To counteract such biases, we identified the need to move these decisions to another analytical entity: the group.

After pointing out the difficulties encountered in group decision making, highlighting the violence that the group itself can exert on its members, just as Theodor W. Adorno had indicated in the mid-nineteenth century, we opted to propose a method of group decision-making that can be

Table 1. Relationship between Adorno, Habermas and the DIAD

Dimensions	Adorno	Habermas	World Café - Design principles
Ethical responsible		An orientation that delves deeper into understanding than success, since the opposite would privilege the interest in achieving an "end" over communicative agreement, if that were to be required.	– Create a hospitable space – Explore questions that matters – Encourage everyone contributions – Listening together for patterns and insights
Ethical responsible		The establishment of coordinated processes adopted by free approval and without community coercion.	– Connect diverse perspectives – Share collective discoveries and use the "harvest" phase to reach agreements
Stakeholders involvement		An awareness of the "lived world" of the speakers and the need to transcend it in order to arrive at a shared "lived world." "Lived world" should be taken to mean the intuitively previously-known context of the realm of action. Meaning, the context is what allows for interpretation and interaction based on the effects of a determined action.	– Connect diverse perspectives – Share collective discoveries
Technically sustainable		Communicative action geared towards understanding, requiring that such communication should be real and adjusted to community principles that are sincere and mutually-agreed upon .	– Set the context
Stakeholders involvement		A consciousness of the complexity that is implied undertaking a decentralization of the world in order to give way to a progressive assumption of group dynamics in which the individually assumed backgrounds of the "lived worlds" of its members will converge.	– Listening together for patterns and insights – Connect diverse perspectives – Share collective discoveries and use the "harvest" phase to reach agreements
Stakeholders involvement & Technical sustainable			As a large group methods, by design, all key stakeholders have to be in the room
Ethical responsible & Technical sustainable	Memory of the past wrong		– Set the context

and World Café process with sustainable ethical decisions criteria

World Café - fine-tune	DIAD - Design Principles	DIAD – fine-tune
	– Authentic dialogue (reciprocity, relationship, learning & creativity)	
	– Authentic dialogue (reciprocity, relationship, learning & creativity)	
	– Diversity of interest (characteristics of participants) – Interdependence of interest (characteristics of participants)	
At the beginning of the process the participants will encourage and take care of this Habermas premise and its implementations	– Authentic dialogue (reciprocity, relationship, learning & creativity)	
	– Authentic dialogue (reciprocity, relationship, learning & creativity)	
	– Diversity of interest (characteristics of participants) – Interdependence of interest (characteristics of participants)	
At the beginning of the conversation the participants will be encouraged to remember past experiences and learn from there		At the beginning of the conversation the participants will be encouraged to remember past experiences and learn from there

adjusted in a way that can embrace and fulfill Habermas' premises as well as Adorno's suggestions. These methods will allow decisions to be made in a way that will be technically solvent, ethically responsible and shared by all the involved stakeholders.

As a preamble to the development of some proposed solutions, we acknowledged the counterargument that R. Rorty's pragmatism implies for the universal legitimacy of Habermas' principle of equality.

In order to operationalise Habermas' proposal we suggested two methods based on complexity science. The nature of the complex adaptive system dynamics generates the conditions to achieve Habermas' premises. The "DIAD method" and the "World Café method" are two examples of the how a social system can be created guaranteeing the inexistence of one of the principal criticisms of the practical impossibility of Habermas' proposal: the challenge of a real acknowledgement between equals within an organisational context wherein different levels of power exist. There is no central system that controls the flow of information in these methods; rather, the group itself becomes a network of interactions where information is exchanged and heuristics and shared meanings are developed – thus leading to shared decisions.

When the proper stakeholders have been involved in the decision-making process, following the aforementioned premises, the output of that decision will be sustainable because it will have been reached by the proper stakeholders and enough knowledge will be in the room to achieve technical solvency.

This paper contributes to the ethical decision field with a clear proposal for operationalisation of very well established models for decision-making that have been questioned in the literature because of implementation difficulties.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The limitations of the present work are framed by its theoretical character. The paper establishes the relationship between the proposals made by Habermas and Adorno and two procedures supported by empirical evidence (but not specifically designed for ethical decision-making). Future lines of research can be derived from the theoretical relationships presented in this paper. These lines consist in the need to implement these procedures and empirically examine whether the re-

lationship presented in the paper produces data that confirm the hypothesis.

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