

**ACCOUNTABILITY****Guest Editors: Bernard Pras, Philippe Zarlowski****9 Contributors to this issue**

- 13 *Accountability: Effectiveness and legitimacy issues*  
Bernard Pras, Philippe Zarlowski

In a context of financial and economic crisis, issues of legitimacy and effectiveness of the accountability processes have become salient and three main questions arise. First, in the field of governance and codes of good conduct, do “comply or explain”, “pay on say” mechanisms and non-financial reporting produce the expected results in terms of regulation? Do these mechanisms actually increase transparency about firms’ activities, decisions and environmental and social impacts? Second, accountability processes are often underlain by legitimacy conflicts and ambiguities in the structuring of responsibilities. What are the consequences for the functioning of society and organizations? Third, what are the dynamics of action and regulation regarding accountability mechanisms and how do these mechanisms evolve and take shape over time? In this article, we put the contributions to this special issue into perspective, and show how they can help respond to these questions.

**I – Accountability, governance and effectiveness**

- 35 *Comply or explain, an avatar of accountability*  
Anne-Laure Boncori, Isabelle Cadet

To what extent the adoption of the comply or explain mechanism by various European Union countries, and in particular by France, turns out to be a perverted form of accountability? That is the very subject of this transdisciplinary article relating to codes of good governance. Flexibility in the implementation of this mechanism appears inversely proportional to the rigor required by a high level of transparency. The evolution of corporate practices reveals the rise of

conformism that runs the risk of a perversion of principles. Indeed, the comply or explain logic tends to substitute to the accountability principle an optional application of private norms associated with corporate governance.

57 *Accountability for executive compensation:*

*What to expect from say on pay?*

François Belot, Édith Ginglinger

The AFEP-MEDEF corporate governance code amended in 2013 introduces the say on pay principle, which grants shareholders the right to vote on executive remuneration at annual general meetings. This paper aims at reviewing the studies undertaken in countries that have established this principle for several years. Say on pay proposals are rarely voted down, but a marked increase in the sensibility of CEO pay to performance is observed for those companies that experienced high voting dissents. The major impacts of say on pay are a better dialogue between shareholders, CEOs and boards in advance of annual meetings as well as an increase in proxy advisory influence.

73 *Do we need a better regulation of non financial reporting?*

Béatrice Boyer-Allirol

This paper aims to explain why CSR information is not fully considered by investors. We contend that the regulation of CSR reporting is not constraining enough to make companies disclose complete and high quality non-financial information likely to be used by investors. CSR information needs to be more strongly constrained, notably by means of international regulation, in order to avoid selective disclosures. Furthermore, to enhance credibility, CSR disclosures have to be audited. Finally, all breaches in compliance requirements have to be subject to sanctions.

## II – Legitimacy contests and ambiguity in responsibilities

99 *From democracy in America to à la française accountability.*

*Grasping the sociopolitical origins of accountability*

Vassili Joannidès, Stéphane Jaumier

Whilst native French speakers oftentimes collapse accountability to account giving, this paper outlines the shape of an accountability ala française. Reading Tocqueville's (1835) work highlights that accountability as practiced in Anglo-Saxon countries has been an offspring of American democracy. An accountability a la française would be characterised by conformance to a set or universal values, the submission of minorities to choices made by the majority, a means obligation as well as the rejection of transparency.

- 117 *The accountability of public managers. Theoretical elements and observations drawn from the Quebec experience*  
Joseph Facal, Bachir Mazouz

This paper deals with the accountability of public managers in a context in which the relationships between elected officials, civil servants and high-ranking managers of government agencies are becoming ever more complex. The authors acquiesce a conceptual framework which allows to apprehend this complexity, which generates governance tensions, at four distinct analytical levels: institutional, organizational, managerial and instrumental. They illustrate their approach by explaining the historical evolution of the notion of accountability and its concrete manifestations in the civil service of the province of Quebec. They conclude by pleading in favor of a combination of institutional and instrumental approaches of the concept and practice of public sector accountability. The latter should be thought and deployed with a particular emphasis on the dilemmas, paradoxes and uncertainties which public action inevitably generates.

- 133 *When accountability turns into settling old scores. HR director and managers facing absenteeism*  
Denis Monneuse, Benoît Gautier

This article surveys accountability's methods and limits in the case of actors not bound by direct hierarchical authority. Drawn from an action-research conducted in a French service company's call centers, it focuses on the absenteeism case. Unlike the panoptic configuration highlighted by Foucault, accountability works both ways. Due to a lack of reliable tools and of precise responsibilities, accountability is likely to turn into settling old scores and, further, to strengthen inaction. Hence, accountability turns out to be counterproductive in case of not well enough defined authority.

- 147 *Managerial accountability in hospitals: Does this model work after all?*  
Émilie Bérard, Véronique Steyer

In this article, we investigate the formal accountability model that is now being put into practice in French hospitals, the model of managerial accountability. We adopt a critical perspective, both ideologically and technically, on the implementation in a public hospital of a new management and measurement system of the departments' performance, based on contracts. This allows us firstly to empirically illustrate the difficulties of implementing such a system. Secondly, we show how in practice such a system was put in place in a "softened" way that finally proved to be relevant for the organization, subject to certain conditions.

### III – The dynamics of accountability

171 *The internal and external purposes of an accountability device.*

*A case study*

Hervé Dumez, Élodie Gigout et Benoit Journé

Firms can hardly put their practices in perfect harmony with their speeches, and cannot communicate on everything they do. Consequently, they are regularly placed in a position of having to be accountable. The case study shows how a device to give account is set, how it articulates internal purposes (management improvements) and external ones (providing information to the public and authorities) and how, if it is intended to last, it must find a balance between continuity and change, problems moving over time (some being fixed, new ones appearing).

181 *Environmental labelling. A new way for the company to be held accountable for*

Agnès François-Lecompte, Michel Gentric, Nathalie Audigier

This article focuses on environmental labelling as a new accountability and reporting tool for companies and their stakeholders. A study was carried out on 18 hotels which developed a label that reflects their environmental performance. The analysis of the semi-structured interviews highlights the hotel managers-stakeholders interactions arising from this environmental display. On the overall, seven internal and external stakeholders have been identified, which demonstrates the relevance of environmental labelling as a tool for dialogue with business partners.

201 *Producing social accounting. The art of performative compromise*

Jean-Pascal Gond, Jacques Igalens, Luc Brès

How is social accounting produced and how accountable are corporations for their social responsibility? This paper develops a performative compromise framework for studying how theories and ideologies, the actors who create or mobilize them, and their instrumentation, interact together to produce a form of social accountability. To evaluate our framework, we compare two moments during which the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) has been translated in the French law: the 1977 Law on Bilan social (social balance sheet), and the 2001 Law on Nouvelles réglementations économiques (new economic regulations).

227 **Summary**