Call for Papers

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Corporate Responsibility

Initiatives and Mechanisms

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This special issue of *Business & Society* seeks to examine the following question: How do institutions and actors internal to the firm as well as external to the firm (at the sector, national, regional, and global levels) influence choices regarding corporate responsibility (CR) *mechanisms* and CR *initiatives*? We invite papers from all social science disciplines (business, economics, political science, sociology, and public policy) that explore these issues in the national, regional, comparative, or global contexts. We welcome all methodological approaches.

CR has emerged as an important source of innovation as well as a constraint on modern competitiveness. Deemed by some an altruistic give-a-way beyond the economic interests of the firm (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001) CR is also considered a tangible investment toward "operating in tune with the way the world works" (Gates, 2008)—effective management reflecting investment commitments to what the organization values (Carroll, 1999; Graves & Waddock, 1994; Griffin, 2008).

CR, at a minimum, can be viewed as a cluster of a firm's policies, programs, and outcomes that are beyond the requirements of extant law. These CR initiatives may include paying wages beyond the legal minimum, healthcare benefits if not provided by the state, retirement funds, philanthropic donations, community investments, pollution abatement technologies as well as products and services that surpass regulatory requirements. In different sectors, contexts, and geographies the bundle of initiatives and beneficiaries of a firm's CR initiatives differs.

Arguably, only those beyond-compliance policies that explicitly seek to serve a broader social purpose should be classified as CR. A multinational corporation might find it economical to replicate the same technology across facilities, although the baseline legal standards may differ across jurisdictions. Hence, a technology barely meeting legal requirements in one jurisdiction might be considered beyond compliance elsewhere. Would this be classified as CR, although the intent of the corporation was to attain economies of scale in facility management? While it is important to know the actual (as opposed to declared) motivations behind an action, empirically, this is very difficult. Hence, we treat all beyond-compliance actions, irrespective of their motivations, as CR.

If one views CR initiatives as expressions of corporate strategy, identity, power, or dependency on specific actors and institutions, the managerial challenge becomes understanding *why* and *how* a corporation seeks to pursue CR. Organizations can choose from a menu of CR initiatives that focus on different issue areas or differentially benefit stakeholder groups. Given that resources devoted to CR are finite, how does a corporation decide which ones to pursue? These initiatives might be directed at internal actors, external stakeholders residing in the community where the corporation has a facility, investors, governments, consumers, suppliers, or citizens that are not directly impacted by the firm's value creation processes.

For analytical simplicity we classify various CR initiatives in the following categories.

CR Initiatives

Functional

Human resources. These initiatives are directed toward raising the economic, social, and political opportunities for employees, contract workers, and potential employees in the workplace. They could seek to enhance employee voice, improve employee benefits, wages, working conditions, and so on. They could focus on a specific subset of employees or specific issues such as women representation, diversity, stigma, and ethnic or linguistic capabilities. Often directed toward internal stakeholders, workplace/labor CR initiatives often appeal to pools of potential employees and broader actors via the media affecting corporate reputation.

Marketing. A key activity here is encompassing new product features, for example, the introduction of seat belts by Volvo or the introduction of hybrid cars by Toyota. Consumer-oriented CR encompasses product and process innovations (e.g., less carbon, water, energy content) as well as promotion, advertising, and distribution strategies. Green marketing, pass-through philanthropy for consumers, improved product functionality (e.g., miniaturization), and new products (carbon offsets, etc.) are often the earliest evidence of consumer-oriented CR.

Supply chain. These initiatives are directed at securing the acquisition or accumulation of needed inputs. Needed inputs include access to capital, raw materials, and technology. Supply chain CR initiatives may focus on monitoring and enforcing codes of conduct; carbon, water, or energy footprints from the extended enterprise; and developing supplier innovations or securing sustainable supplies (e.g., minimizing packaging, reforestation). This includes securing permits to operate (e.g., mine site licenses, fishing permits), socially responsible funding, human rights/labor/workplace issues within the supply chain or access to nonrenewable resources.

Cross-Functional/Corporate

Development. These initiatives are directed at building social capital, creating infrastructure and capabilities in communities to build commerce, stabilize households, and improve public health, education, or general welfare. These may be directed at the local community or at the underprivileged sections of the society that may not be directly affected by the corporation. The objectives are threefold: first, to enhance the human capital; second, to improve the physical infrastructure for the underprivileged to leverage their human capital; and third, to enhance the social capital of a given community. Initiatives can range from providing tangible, bricks, and mortar resources for community events such as hospitals and schools to a transferring of skills and expertise (e.g., fundraising, project coordination, access to capital, grant writing) for enhancing community infrastructure.

Environment. These initiatives seek to generate positive environmental externalities or reduce the production of negative environmental externalities associated with producing the organization's goods and services These activities can be directed at specific actors (e.g., community groups impacted by contaminated water streams) or institutions (e.g., investors, regulators).

Corporate governance. These initiatives seek to improve corporate governance and voluntarily create new rules regulating the generation and/or the disbursement of the residual or profit. These activities could seek to provide for investor protection, new financial disclosure requirements, limits of executive compensation, and so on.

CR Mechanisms

CR initiatives can be pursued via a variety of mechanisms. Once decided what to do, how does the corporation decide how to do? How does it match initiatives with mechanisms? We identify four types of mechanisms.

Unilateral Acts

Corporations donate resources (cash, materials, employee time, etc.) to various CR initiatives. Some of these unilateral acts might be episodic whereas others might be regular investments by a corporation. A corporation may sponsor periodic community activities such as an annual parade, fireworks, or an employee volunteerism day. Alternatively, unilateral corporate investments might be directed to improving product quality, process enhancements (e.g., less carbon, water), reporting and verifying CR initiatives, or securing ethical suppliers in a timely manner. Actors and institutions may be located in far-flung locales, especially when the corporation is seeking to respond to an episodic event such as a natural calamity.

Foundations

These are sponsored by the corporation, individuals, or governmental agencies. The objective is to create a long-term institutional system to support developmental, environmental, public health, or other activities in the local community or in developing countries. Though these are also unilateral acts of giving, by establishing a foundation, the corporation institutionalizes its commitment to pursuing CR policies and physically locates its CR initiatives outside the corporation. Furthermore, these foundations tend to be managed by professionals who are typically recruited from the nonprofit community. The Ford Foundation and the Gates Foundation are two prominent examples of this genre of CR mechanisms.

Partnerships

Corporations (as opposed to their foundations) can enter into partnerships with governments and/or NGOs, which includes different types of relationships, including bilateral or trilateral compacts. These tend to be contractually based relationships focused on achieving a specific objective (e.g., access to capital, roads built, numbers of people trained) enabling actors, institutions, and the organization to team up and coordinate skills and expertise in specific areas. The objectives can range from strengthening local communities as well as furthering economic development abroad. For example, a corporation may team up with local agriculture cooperatives and local governments to provide fertilizers, set priced seeds, and education on sustainable farming while guaranteeing a specific price for if quantity and quality demands are met.

Voluntary Programs

These pertain to collective, rule-based endeavors that a group of corporations agree to join (Prakash & Potoski, 2006). These systems can be established or managed by an industry association (Responsible Care, Fair Trade, the Equator Principles, and the Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative), NGOs (Forest Stewardship Council), or even governments (Energy Star). Voluntary programs typically seek to encourage corporations to adopt beyond-compliance policies that lead to production of positive externalities or the reduction of the negative externalities associated with its production, distribution, or marketing processes. As opposed to supporting philanthropic and charitable objectives, these programs tend to be established with regulatory requirements as the baseline.

The specific types of CR initiatives and the mechanism by which they are pursued tend to vary across countries (in a given sector) or across sectors within a given country. We suggest that the "demand for" as well as the "supply" of CR is significantly conditioned by the institutional and stakeholder environment in which firms operate. As institutional theory, resource dependence theory, and the variety of capitalism literatures suggest, regulatory and governance styles are influenced by the institutional and sectors contexts in which firms operate. Some questions papers might explore are as follows:

- How do the variations in the institutional context affect the ways business pursues CR?
- If different institutions, actors, and stakeholder sets favor or disfavor specific types of CRs, how do corporations balance competing demands?
- How do business–government and business–NGO relations influence the demands for CR and, consequently, shape the emergence and design of CR?
- Why do firms favor unilateral supply of CR as opposed to joining collective CR codes?
- Do the firm's institutional and stakeholder contexts encourage it to invest in specific areas such as environmental issues or community outreach, but not others?
- How does the organizational structure influence the choices of CR mechanisms and initiatives?
- Under what conditions do preferences of key managers bear upon the decisions regarding CR initiatives and mechanisms?
- How do multinational corporations handle the pressures from globalization and localization regarding CR initiatives and mechanisms? Under what conditions and in what ways does the parent company grant substantial autonomy to its subsidiaries in this regard?

Submission Instructions

The format of the papers must follow *Business & Society* contribution guidelines. *Business & Society* uses the American Psychological Association citation and reference system (please see any recent copy of the journal for a sample; visit http://www.sagepub.com/journalsProdManSub.nav?prodId=Journal200878).

Papers should include a 100- to 150-word abstract followed by 3 to 5 keywords. The paper itself should contain no indications of authorship. A title page containing full author contact information should be sent as a separate document to the coeditors.

Tentative Dates and Timetable

Target Dates	Target Activities
June 1, 2010	Paper to be submitted electronically to the following coeditors: Jennifer J. Griffin (e-mail: jgriffin@gwu.edu) Aseem Prakash (e-mail: aseem@u.washington.edu)
September 1, 2010	Authors invited to revise and resubmit papers
November 30, 2010	Revised papers are due
April 30, 2011	Delivery of full set of papers and guest editors' introductory paper

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