

## FROM THE EDITORS

### Thematic Issue on Corporate Social Responsibility

## CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY: AN OVERVIEW AND NEW RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The idea of corporate social responsibility (CSR)—that is, businesses bearing a responsibility to society and a broader set of stakeholders beyond its shareholders—gained currency in the 1960s. Since then, attention on CSR has been growing in both academic and practitioner communities around the world. While there have been criticisms and debates on whether it was appropriate for corporations to expand their remit beyond shareholder value, an increasing majority of corporations have proactively committed to addressing larger societal challenges. With a variety of options for corporate engagement in mainstream society and local communities, corporations have created dedicated organizational units to effectively manage their social obligations. There is commensurate growth in specialized organizations operating at national and global levels that advise on, and often implement, targeted short-term projects or longer-term sustained community-level programs. Over 8,000 companies from more than 150 countries are signatories to the United Nations' Global Compact, covering issues on human rights, labor standards, the environment, and anti-corruption initiatives. The scale and prominence of these trends indicate that discussions of CSR have shifted from existential questions regarding organizational mission and shareholder value to the mechanisms and processes by which corporations conceptualize and enact their societal obligations. Similarly, the dialog has shifted from simplistic justifications of financial outcomes related to core businesses to sophisticated views and measures of societal outcomes.

In this thematic issue,<sup>1</sup> we bring together a collection of seven studies to serve as exemplars of how CSR

research is being more broadly construed and conceptualized. Further, we provide an overview of CSR research published in *Academy of Management Journal (AMJ)* over nearly six decades. Our goal for this editorial is not to develop new theory; instead, our aim is to highlight the ever-growing breadth and depth of this literature and point to promising new avenues for extending our understanding of this complex issue. This thematic issue progresses this editorial team's effort to highlight management scholarship on societal roles of corporations and organizations. First, we called for research on "organizational purpose" as a guide for individual and organizational action through which businesses serve as generators, rather than consumers, of trust and goodwill (Hollensbe, Wookey, Loughlin, George, & Nichols, 2014). We outlined potential research questions on six values that could help organizations achieve purpose: dignity, solidarity, plurality, subsidiarity, reciprocity, and sustainability. In order to make organizational purpose a defining characteristic, appropriate behaviors and practices are needed to strengthen the character of the individual, the organization, and society (Hollensbe et al., 2014).

In the February 2016 *AMJ* issue, we showcased 15 articles in a thematic issue on reputation, status, and social evaluation in management research. We called attention to studies that tackle important questions on the generation or creation of goodwill, reputation, image, or status, collectively and loosely termed as "social evaluations," and how organizations seek, leverage, deploy, and benefit from such social evaluations (George, Dahlander, Graffin, & Sim, 2016). In the current thematic issue, we add to this effort by bringing together studies that lay emphasis on businesses as positive and responsible contributors to society and as tools with which to shape and facilitate social change.

As an organizational phenomenon, CSR has become increasingly prevalent and visible within corporations as a mechanism to energize and motivate stakeholders, as well as manage societal perceptions and expectations on the role and utility of businesses in societies and communities beyond the core

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<sup>1</sup> The articles in this thematic issue were accepted into the journal under normal review processes and were not part of any Special Research Forum call. The articles were curated to bring out a theme and highlight phenomena and theories of interest across scholars who use micro and macro approaches to address important management and organizational problems.

function of producing and selling goods to a defined consumer market. An Ernst & Young (2012) report on sustainability highlighted two specific trends in CSR worth noting. First, CSR has become a dedicated organizational function with clear reporting lines into senior executive teams. Here, managers in charge of coordinating social activities often also are key decision makers within the organizational structure. In a growing number of corporations, the chief financial officers play an important role in strategic decisions on resource allocation for CSR activities, as well as framing and asking crucial questions concerning how shareholder resources are being invested to generate greater societal value and the targeted returns to the company, in terms of brand perceptions or societal goodwill, giving it a broader license to operate. An Indian conglomerate known for its “salt to steel” diversified range of businesses, Tata Sons, has a dedicated member of its group executive council who serves as Tata’s brand custodian with oversight of all CSR activities as chairman of the Tata global sustainability council. The Tata group views its efforts in CSR as central to its identity as builder of economic and social institutions in the markets in which it operates.

Second, there is a significant increase in the involvement of employee engagement in CSR activities. While customers have been traditionally considered the key driver of companies’ social initiatives, employees have become at least as important as, if not more important than, customers in driving company sustainability initiatives. For instance, in Danone, the Paris-based food company, employees are heavily involved in the company’s social projects co-created with nonprofit partners. Citi, the global financial services company, actively engages employees in its Citi Volunteers program, with a focus on being embedded in and contributing to the improvement of local communities. MasterCard, the payments business, similarly engages employees and stakeholders for targeted efforts on financial and social inclusion for the unbanked in less developed parts of the world. There are numerous examples of small businesses as well as larger corporates, such as Vodafone, Microsoft, Google, or Starbucks, providing a range of CSR targeted efforts deployed through an actively engaged employee culture of contributing to social causes. These trends suggest that CSR efforts are well integrated into the cultural fabric of a growing number of corporates. Over the past two decades, the issue for companies seems to be no longer about whether or not to engage in CSR, but rather on how to conduct CSR in

a strategically and effectively planned manner with a clear and demonstrable narrative of its *impact* on company and community.

Despite this shared enthusiasm, many corporations find that they face significant challenges. First, the effectiveness of CSR efforts is often difficult to observe, especially when justifying a short-run investment, and may be limited by internal systems that do not allow companies to measure, track, and optimize their sustainability impact. The lack of transparency and goal clarity often make it difficult to understand and manage the risks and boundaries of corporate social activities. Second, CSR encompasses multiple dimensions involving different stakeholder groups while companies are constrained with limited resources, especially in years of financial turbulence—thus, conflicts of interest among stakeholder groups competing for financial resources and managerial attention may arise. How managers prioritize and balance aspects of CSR is often a challenge facing many corporations.

Moreover, the complexity in “organizing and managing” CSR is exacerbated for multinational corporations. Increasingly, many countries and regions have started to mandate or specify certain aspects of CSR for corporations operating in their territories. For example, India has a new “2% rule” that mandates corporations to spend 2% of net profits on charitable causes under the supervision of a board-level CSR subcommittee. In Europe, the Directive Amendments, adopted on April 15, 2014, require public mandatory disclosure by public corporations of nonfinancial information on policies, outcomes, and risks relating to social issues. In contrast, Brazil and China have more voluntary regulations for CSR disclosure. The challenging issue here is for multinational corporations to engage in CSR efforts with a global-level effectiveness. These policy mandates indicate government and societal expectations that businesses reallocate some of their profits toward social development causes as a norm rather than a voluntary choice. What is clear is that businesses are being expected to do more for local communities, and to show that they are doing so effectively.

## RESEARCH TRENDS IN CSR

As a leading management journal, *AMJ* is devoted to testing and building theories that contribute to management practice. The accumulated knowledge created by academic research on CSR provides potential guidance for management practices, as well as

conceptual frameworks and methods for addressing the managerial, organizational, and societal challenges in CSR practices. We have identified a few major trends in CSR research, based on an overview of the articles published in *AMJ* over nearly 60 years of the journal. Between 1958 and 2015, *AMJ* has published 87 articles on the topic, excluding the current issue. Based on a content analysis of these articles, we have detected some trends in CSR research organized by decade. Figure 1 represents the frequency of published articles; as can be seen, the number of articles on CSR is stable across the decades, with some increase from the 1990s onwards.

### Organizing CSR: Moving from Antecedents and Outcomes to Processes

To understand the focus of management scholarship in CSR, we have classified CSR research broadly into three types, based on the content of these studies: (1) antecedent, (2) outcome, and (3) process. The “antecedent” category includes articles examining factors that determine firm engagement in CSR. Articles grouped into “outcome” examine the consequences of CSR, and the last category contains studies that intend to understand the “process” of CSR decision making or implementation, and how stakeholders interpret and respond to corporate social activities. In Figure 2, a notable trend can be seen with respect to an increase of “process” articles that emphasize the organization of CSR activities. While there were some articles falling into this category in the 1960s and 1970s, process studies on CSR in those periods were mostly descriptive in nature. A resurgence of “process”-based research occurs in the 2000s and 2010s, reflecting the growing interest in an

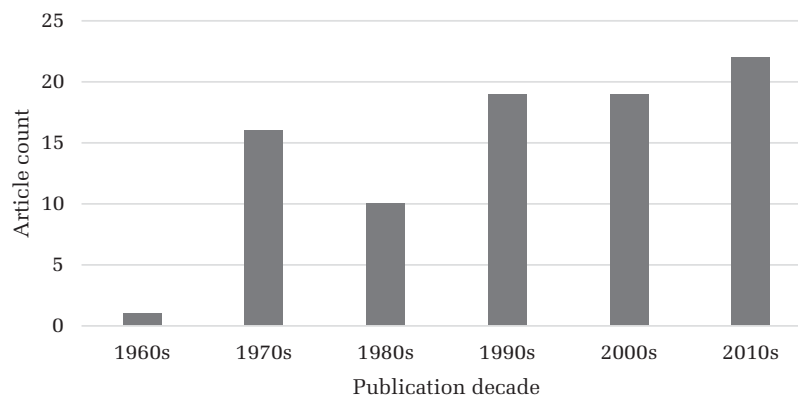
in-depth understanding of corporate decision making and implementation of CSR.

Process studies tend to leverage data access and richness of qualitative methods of inquiry by examining CSR topics that are rigorous in the underlying activities by which organizations engage in CSR. For example, applying inductive case study methods, MacLean and Behnam (2010) and Pache and Santos (2013) examined firms’ decoupling (symbolic compliance programs) and coupling (combination of “social welfare logic” and “commercial logic”) practices respectively, providing explanations for how firms engage in such practices and their consequences. Mair and Hehenberger (2014) traced the evolution of venture philanthropy in Europe, putting forward new perspectives on what “giving” means and how it can effect social change.

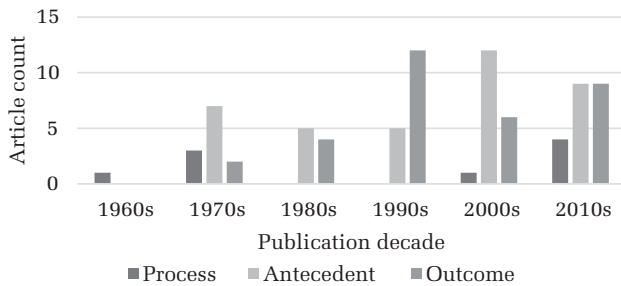
### Moving beyond Shareholder Value: From Financial to Organizational Performance

As shown in Figure 2, the number of articles on outcomes of CSR continually increased from 1970s and peaked in 1990s, perhaps reflecting the efforts to resolve the debate in both practice and academic research in the 1980s and 1990s regarding the CSR–corporate financial performance relationship—that is, whether or not corporations financially benefit from engaging in social activities. After the 1990s, the number of outcome studies still maintained at a relatively high level, and incurred another increase in the 2000s and 2010s. If the articles in the “outcome” category are further classified (Figure 3), it becomes clear that there is a conceptual shift from financial outcomes to non-financial, social, and organizational outcomes. This trend captures the

**FIGURE 1**  
CSR Research in *AMJ*, 1958–2015



**FIGURE 2**  
Contents in CSR Research

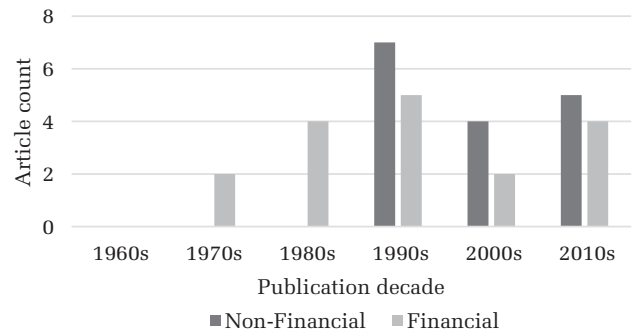


interest in a broader construal of the role of businesses and corporations in society, as well as in untangling the mechanisms (likely mediating factors) through which CSR is linked to financial performance. Some of the non-financial outcomes examined include corporate attractiveness for job seekers (Jones, Willness, & Madey, 2014), customer satisfaction (Conlon & Murray, 1996), CEO succession (Gomulya & Boeker, 2014), and executive compensation (Berrone & Gomez-Mejia, 2009), among others.

**Unpacking the Dimensions of CSR: From Aggregate to Specific Dimensions**

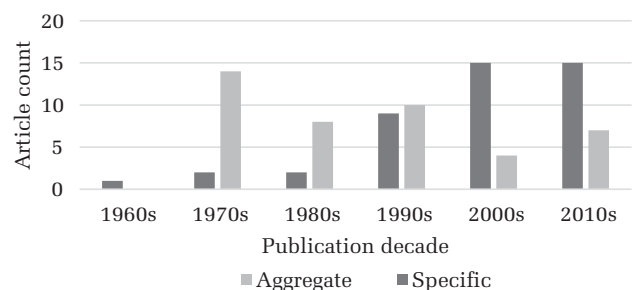
We also find a significant shift in CSR studies from examining CSR as an aggregate of multiple social dimensions to focusing on a specific element of social activities (Figure 4), such as employee relations (Jones et al., 2014), product quality (e.g., Mishina, Dykes, Block, & Pollock, 2010; Zavyalova, Pfarrer, Reger, & Shapiro, 2012), and environmental performance (e.g., Diestre & Rajagopalan, 2014; Flammer, 2013; Shepherd, Patzelt, & Baron, 2013), among others. For instance, Ramus and Steger (2000) examined environmental initiatives at the employee level, and suggested that a strong organizational commitment to the environment facilitated employee environmental initiatives. Mishina and colleagues (2010) investigated the customer dimension and examine product recall as a corporate social action, and found that prominent firms were more likely to make product recalls. By investigating financial reporting fraud as a specific element of socially *irresponsible* firm action, Kang (2008) found evidence of spillover of reputational penalties between firms. Among the studies on specific elements of CSR, the environmental dimension seems to be the most frequently examined (e.g., Aragón-Correa, 1998; Christmann, 2000; Flammer, 2013; Kassinis & Vafeas, 2006).

**FIGURE 3**  
Categories of Outcome



Two factors may explain the growing interest in specific dimensions of CSR. First, there is an increasing awareness among the academic community that an aggregate CSR score does not say much about firm social performance, making the comparison across firms based on such scores less credible (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012; Servaes & Tamayo, 2013). For example, Firm A, which has good environmental performance but does not make financial donations to the community, may have the same aggregate score as Firm B, which has low environmental performance but makes significant community philanthropic commitments. By disaggregating social performance, researchers are better able to articulate the tradeoffs in social performance and the allocation of resources toward such activities. Second, each social dimension has its unique attributes and is worthy of independent scrutiny. For example, corporate philanthropic responses to natural disasters might justify examination independent of whether there are regular and consistent donations to the local community. Such efforts could provide a window into the underlying motives, values, and a temporal perspective of organizational commitment to

**FIGURE 4**  
Measures of CSR



societies, as well as provide a deeper understanding of events and contexts that are likely to trigger corporate engagement.

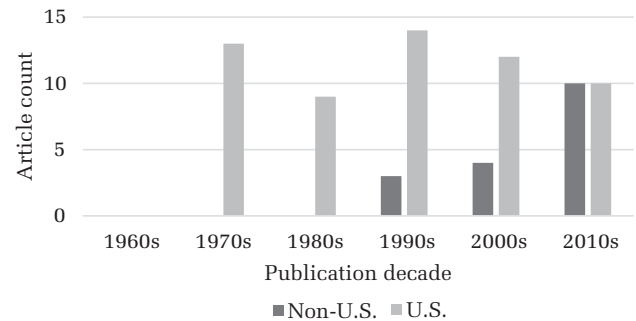
### CSR as a Global Challenge: From U.S. only to Non-U.S.-Based CSR Research

Before the 1990s and even in the 2010s, CSR research published in *AMJ* was dominated by studies using U.S. data. However, the number of articles examining a non-U.S. context or data increased sharply in the 1990s and 2010s. And, now, the number of CSR studies in non-U.S. contexts is comparable in scale to those in the U.S. setting. Countries where CSR activities have been examined include Canada (e.g., Jones et al., 2014; Sharma, 2000), France (Pache & Santos, 2013), Germany (Shepherd et al., 2013), India (Krishnan & Kozhikode, 2015), Japan (Bansal & Clelland, 2004), Russia (Earle, Spicer, & Peter, 2010), Spain (Aragón-Correa, 1998), the United Kingdom (Bansal & Clelland, 2004; Ogden & Watson, 1999), and China (Cumming, Leung, & Rui, 2015; Wang & Qian, 2011). It is worth noting that CSR-related studies in the Chinese context only began to appear in *AMJ* in 2011, but already account for a fifth of articles published in *AMJ* since then. Such an increase in diversity in context perhaps reflects both the globalization process in general, as well as an increasing interest in examining CSR from the perspective of institutional theory (Cullen, Parboteeah, & Hoegl, 2004; Pache & Santos, 2013; Sharma, 2000; Surroca, Tribó, & Zahra, 2013), which fits naturally with studies based on varied institutional contexts.

### ARTICLES IN THIS THEMATIC ISSUE

Articles in this issue are in line with the key trends identified above, but they also mark important departures from conventional CSR research. Two studies fall in the category of process-based research (Crilly, Hansen, & Zollo, 2016; York, Hargrave, & Pacheco, 2016). Crilly and colleagues (this issue) examine stakeholder interpretation of firm claims based on interviews and extensive archival evidence. Drawing on a cognitive–linguistic perspective, the study examines how firms communicate their sustainability commitments and why some stakeholders see through untruthful claims. The study finds that firms cover the same points of content in their reports, but those that practice what they preach use more complex styles of language than do firms that decouple their action from statements. Moreover, generalist stakeholders and those with

**FIGURE 5**  
Country Settings in CSR Research



conflicts of interest do not see through untruthful claims, whereas specialist stakeholders can.

York and colleagues (this issue) examine the hybridization of field logics. Hybridization and hybrid organization is another area of CSR research that has received recent attention. Hybrid logics are defined as rules of action, interaction, and interpretation that integrate the goals of previously incompatible logics through material forms, practices, and governance arrangements. Through an inductive study of the wind energy field in Colorado, the study finds that a hybridized logic emerged through a process in which organizational responses to logic incompatibility drove shifts in the relationship between logics and organizations. Compromise and framing efforts unintentionally initiated a process of logic hybridization by catalyzing proponents of the subordinate logic to contest the dominant logic and alter the balance of power in the field. Hybrid organizations then emerged to establish, legitimize, and embed a new set of interlinked frames, practices, and arrangements that integrated previously incompatible logics. The study's findings suggest that the hybridization of field-level logics is a complex process in which organizational actions and field-level conditions recursively influence each other over time. Both studies use a mixed method approach in which the qualitative study provides opportunities for theory building and an in-depth, micro-level understanding of context, while the systematic analyses of archival data help generalize, to a certain degree, findings from the qualitative data.

Whether or not firms comply with policy regulations and the consequence of compliance (or non-compliance) is an area of CSR research that is also receiving increased attention, with the present *AMJ* issue including three articles in this category. Simons, Vermeulen, and Knoben (this issue) examine the role

of communities in explaining the active resistance of small bars to smoking regulations in 427 Dutch municipalities (communities). The authors argue that the likelihood of organizational resistance to regulation pressure is affected by the social cohesion of the focal community. By incorporating community attributes to account for organizations' heterogeneous responses to regulatory pressure, the study advances current institutional scholarship and demonstrates empirically how such a theory can help explain the success of relatively weak organizational actors' resistance in the face of strong institutional pressures by the state.

While Simon and colleagues examine the role of communities in explaining firm resistance to regulations, Desai (this issue) examines the issue from a different vantage point. Building on theories of how organizations search for and learn from information under uncertainty, the latter study suggests that organizations establish close collaborative relationships with regulatory agents to overcome uncertainty following enforcement actions, further enhancing organizational compliance with enforced mandates. However, organizations with the least visible practices will forego such collaborations because of the risks associated with disclosing private information to regulators. Therefore, this activity is eschewed by organizations with the least transparent practices—paradoxically, those organizations that may be best placed to learn or change the most through these exchanges. Collectively, this study deepens our understanding regarding organizational compliance with external pressures, and emphasizes the role of organizational visibility in interactions with outside agents.

Weigelt and Shittu (this issue) explore the effect of policy regulations on firm resource decisions. Diverging from the existing literature, which points to the influence of competition and regulatory policy on a focal firm's resource decisions, this article examines how policy regulations interact with competitive strategy to affect firm resource allocation in the context of renewable energy investments in waste-to-energy, wind, and solar in the U.S. electricity industry. The authors show that resource redeployment is not simply a function of internal firm decisions but a response to external forces. They find that regulatory mandates dampen the effect of competitors' new resource investments on a focal firm's new resource investments.

While most CSR studies have been conducted at the firm level, there is nascent interest in research at the individual—and, particularly, at the employee—level of analysis. Rodell and Lynch (this issue) examine how employee volunteering is perceived by others in the workplace. Drawing from theories of

person perception and attribution, they argue that colleagues give credit to employee volunteering when they attribute it to intrinsic reasons and stigmatize it when they attribute it to impression management reasons. Further, volunteering is rewarded by supervisors and coworkers when it is attributed to intrinsic motives; and this relationship is amplified when stigmas are low. These arguments are confirmed by both a field study and a laboratory experiment.

Jayasinghe (this issue) addresses another specific CSR issue related to employees—labor code adoption—and does so in an emerging economy context. In particular, using longitudinal data on a sample of apparel manufacturing plants in Sri Lanka, Jayasinghe (2016) studies the labor code adoption of these plants. Extending human resource management theory to the context of emerging economy manufacturing, the study demonstrates that the voluntary adoption of a labor code may constitute an effective human resource investment in emerging economies in improving establishment-level employee outcomes and operational and financial performance.

#### POSSIBLE DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The cumulative amount of research published in *AMJ* on CSR is indeed quite significant. Our empirical contexts have now become more diverse, the questions being asked delve deeper into the nuanced challenges facing senior executives. The literature has shifted from pondering existential questions on whether firms should engage in societal challenges to whether and how communities benefit from organizational interventions in addressing seemingly intractable challenges such as education, health, poverty, energy, and environment. Yet, there is more to be done. These areas include managing the risks and boundaries of social activities, prioritizing/balancing different stakeholders and aspects of CSR, and dealing with complexities in CSR for multinational corporations. Next, we provide some suggested directions for future CSR research, which hopefully can enhance and broaden academic knowledge on CSR, but also help address the practical challenges faced by executives and corporations.

#### Stakeholder Claims and Interdependencies

We encourage researchers to examine the interconnections among different stakeholder claims. There have been many studies on the relationships between shareholders and other stakeholders.

Studies that examine the stock market reaction to social activities (e.g., Flammer, 2013; Gomulya & Boeker, 2014; Kang, 2008) fall in this category. Based on the premise of shareholder primacy, an implicit claim/assumption of these studies is that a social activity is desirable/undesirable when shareholders react to it positively/negatively. Future research may go beyond such claims to study the interaction of shareholders and other stakeholders and how firms resolve the conflict between them, without assuming that the primacy of the shareholder claim over that of other stakeholders, including employees. Work on hybrid organizations (e.g., Almandoz, 2012; Elsbach & Sutton, 1992; Pache & Santos, 2013), which typically combine a social welfare logic of a nonprofit and the commercial logic of a for-profit business, can be considered a step toward that direction. Similarly, collective actions problems such as tackling climate change and CSR actions within that framework likely have complex interdependencies in stakeholder claims (Howard-Grenville, Buckle, Hoskins, & George, 2014).

In addition to the tension between shareholders and other stakeholders, conflicts may also arise among different non-shareholder stakeholder groups. For instance, the Cape Wind project initially proposed in 2001 by the Energy Management Inc., a Boston-based company, in the Nantucket Sound in Massachusetts was impeded due to conflicting interests among different stakeholders, including wealthy homeowners, environmentalists, individuals concerned about potential hazard for cultural resources, and the government looking to promote employment. The 500-megawatt, 130 offshore wind turbines project was finally approved in 2010. However, little research offers insight into resolving such conflicts. Instead, previous studies often examine non-shareholder stakeholders together as a combined group, implicitly assuming that employees, suppliers, customers, community, and government share a similar utility function. Moreover, while research examining specific dimensions of CSR help enhance our understanding of individual stakeholder groups and their interactions with firms, each stakeholder claim is considered independently, without accounting for their interdependencies.

### **Compliance, Commitment, or Competing Priorities? Mechanisms and Motives behind CSR**

Studies in this thematic issue highlight tradeoffs of compliance versus commitment as motives for engaging in CSR. With regulatory mandates in

countries such as India that require firms to invest in CSR activities, organizations may adopt different strategies or responses to manage their CSR exposure. For example, an unintentional consequence of mandates could be a motivational crowding out of incentives such that efforts in CSR become a means to allocate resources to pet projects with limited societal value, or, worse still, become a cover for graft and corruption by funding local political projects or organizations. In contrast, many businesses prefer not to publicize their CSR activities. Perhaps there is a competing interest under which motives for “quiet” philanthropy are crowded out by social media exercises to build reputation or status. The motives behind why organizations engage in CSR may well be reflected in how they go about implementing and delivering on it. Such mapping of motives and efforts and their contingencies become rich avenues for future research.

Even when firms have a clear social mission, there could be variations in what is considered to be a successful engagement or outcome. Corporations likely differ in how they measure performance, as well as in how these dimensions of performance may not always align. Would doing well in one stakeholder dimension affect firm performance in some other dimensions? With limited resources, should a firm try to cover all stakeholder dimensions simultaneously, or focus on one or two of the most relevant ones? If the latter, how to decide which are most relevant? In sum, in order to help managers to most effectively deal with the demands from multiple stakeholder groups, future research needs to examine tradeoffs under competing goals and conflicts among different stakeholder groups.

### **Institutional Environments and the Shaping of CSR**

CSR is a social phenomenon; it doesn't exist independent of the firm's institutional context. In examining corporate social activities and their influence on firms and stakeholders, it becomes important to understand CSR's institutional environment. There are two main sources of variations in institutions surrounding CSR. The first is the evolution or change of views on CSR over time within a national context. Unlike other firm operational or investment activities, which have direct effects on firm operational efficiency and outcomes, CSR's influence on firms is often observed indirectly based on the responses of firm stakeholders and the public (Barnett, 2007; Wang, Choi, & Li, 2008). Stakeholder responses to CSR, either positive, neutral, or

negative, are in turn influenced by their views of CSR, which may change over time. For example, in some developed institutions led by the United States, public views of CSR have evolved from being negative in the 1960s and 1970s, when the common view was that social problems should be resolved by government and society through not-for profit organizations instead of by corporations (e.g., Friedman, 1970), to the dominant view today that corporations should play an important role in addressing social problems. It might be interesting for future research to examine, with changing views and expectations of CSR, how firms' motivations to engage in CSR and effect of it on firms have changed over time (Flammer, 2013; Ioannou & Serafeim, 2015), and how firms deal with such dynamics.

Meanwhile, the evolution of CSR in other institutional contexts, especially in some emerging economies, is much less understood and deserves scholarly attention. For example, would the evolution process in an emerging economy follow a similar path as that in developed economies, or differ significantly due to its unique institutional contexts? Would sudden events facilitate or deter the evolution of this process (Tilcsik & Marquis, 2013; Zhang & Luo, 2013)? With an increasingly interconnected world economy as well as the globalization of social practices, would views of CSR in different institutional contexts eventually converge, or settle in different equilibriums? Emerging economies and less-developed countries likely have a different underlying social compact and expectation of the role of businesses. For example, businesses in developed countries may face stronger expectations on environmental responsibility and stewardship of natural resources (e.g., George, Schillebeeckx, & Liak, 2015), while corporations may target their efforts toward social development goals such as education and health. In countries struck by poverty, the social contract likely changes the mechanisms and processes of social engagement actions. These differences in the underlying assumptions behind CSR and the institutional environments in which businesses operate provide a rich context for scholarly inquiry.

Multinational enterprises (MNEs) increasingly deal with CSR issues simultaneously across multiple, diverse institutional environments (Surroca et al., 2013). This suggests that, at a certain point in time, a firm may be exposed to multiple institutional logics associated with corporate social practices. A better understanding of these issues will help address the challenges that managers of MNEs face.

A specific challenge facing MNEs is that, with increased strength, number, and diversity of stakeholders' pressures to compel MNEs to promote CSR activities (e.g., Gardberg & Fombrun, 2006), how MNEs conform to their diverse stakeholders' expectations across national boundaries. Some research findings suggest that MNEs have reacted to mounting stakeholder pressure by shifting their socially irresponsible practices to subsidiaries located in countries with lax stakeholder pressure (Korten, 2001; Surroca et al., 2013). It is quite disturbing that calling for CSR may result in tunneling of corporate social irresponsibility from one country to another. Could future research provide appropriate solutions for corporations to deal with increasing CSR pressure from diverse institutional environments without such sidetracking of socially irresponsible acts? The multinational firm, as an organizational form that balances diverse and often competing interests, requires a more careful scholarly examination of how practices and inherent biases for action of headquarters versus subsidiaries as well as primary versus secondary markets influence the implementation of corporate goals and targeted programs.

### **Individual Roles in CSR**

While most CSR studies have taken a "macro-" or firm-level approach, there is an emerging body of literature that addresses the role of individuals. For example, Rodell and Lynch (this issue) address the issue of employee volunteering, and whether such individual efforts are encouraged or stigmatized. Sonenshein, DeCelles, and Dutton (2014) studied how individuals grapple with their support for environmental issues when there is self-doubt on whether sustained effort leads to positive performance outcomes. Similarly, much less is known on how individual employees perceive corporate philanthropic acts, especially during difficult financial or uncertain periods for employment stability. In responding to disasters or calamities such as war or tsunamis, CSR likely becomes a powerful mechanism for employee and corporate engagement to rebuild individual and social resilience in affected communities (van der Vegt, Essens, Wahlstrom, & George, 2015), which likely has individual implications such as wellbeing, happiness, and job satisfaction. Firms that have strong corporate responsibility missions may also serve as a magnet for highly committed and purpose-driven employees. Such contexts provide potentially



important questions on the cognitive processes of engagement, managing job commitments while balancing social responsibility commitments, and its effects on individual employees and work teams.

Earlier studies of CSR looked at the influences of managers' characteristics on environmental commitment or perceptions (Henriques & Sadorsky, 1999; Sharma, 2000; Weaver, Treviño, & Cochran, 1999). Further research examined corporate unethical behavior from the perspective of top managers and directors, covering topics such as managerial preferences (e.g., Cullen et al., 2004), goal setting (e.g., Schweitzer, Ordóñez, & Douma, 2004), director interlock (Kang, 2008), and board gender diversity (e.g., Cumming et al., 2015). What is lacking, however, is work on the cognitive and motivational conditions that lead stakeholders to evaluate firms' social activities differently. For example, what underpins individual motivations behind CSR activities? Is it profit driven, or a reflection of benevolent managerial/firm values (e.g., Koh, Qian, & Wang, 2014), or a more sustained commitment to tackling a broader social challenge? What are the cues that stakeholders look at for evaluating effectiveness and motivation? From the firms' perspective, how do organizations manage stakeholder perceptions so that they can communicate effectively, to those stakeholders, their CSR activities (e.g., Crilly et al., 2016)? Examining these questions would lead to more nuanced theories of corporate-stakeholder relations, providing us with a deeper appreciation, at the individual level, of how CSR makes an impact.

### CONCLUSION

Our goal for this thematic issue was to highlight the rich empirical work being conducted on CSR. Over the past six decades, our understanding and appreciation of CSR has grown tremendously, along with a more sophisticated view of corporations as having a social remit that balances economic priorities and rent-seeking modes. The seven studies reported in this thematic issue also reflect our evolving understanding of corporations and their interactions with their stakeholders. Our analysis of past studies published in *AMJ* over the past six decades serves to channel our efforts in new directions that tackle the complex interdependencies of stakeholder claims, the coordinated implementation of global programs, and the implications of such efforts across individuals, organizations, and society. It is our hope that this thematic issue will renew discussions of

CSR and organizational purpose, and facilitate empirical contributions that have the potential to inform academic discourse and managerial practice on the transformative role of business in society.

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