



Sustainability, Stakeholder Governance, and Corporate Social Responsibility

Introduction: Contemplating the Connections between Sustainability, Stakeholder Governance, and Corporate Social Responsibility

Sinziana Dorobantu, Ruth V. Aguilera, Jiao Luo, Frances J. Milliken,

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INTRODUCTION: CONTEMPLATING THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN SUSTAINABILITY, STAKEHOLDER GOVERNANCE, AND CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Sinziana Dorobantu, Ruth V. Aguilera, Jiao Luo and Frances J. Milliken

Rising income inequality and climate change dominate headlines, and much attention is devoted to understand the role that corporations play in exacerbating or ameliorating these growing concerns. In response, companies are rethinking their impact on society and on the environment, and their relationships with a broad set of stakeholders, including not only shareholders, employees, customers, and suppliers, but also local communities, governments, and nongovernmental organizations. As a result, the world of business seems once again at a crossroads, as many business leaders and academicians are rethinking the role of business in society, possibly to an unprecedented extent. For instance, in a recent letter to CEOs, Larry Fink, the CEO of BlackRock, the world's largest asset manager, sought to remind business leaders that "to prosper over time, every company must not only deliver financial performance, but also show how it makes a positive contribution to society. Companies must benefit all of their stakeholders, including shareholders, employees, customers, and the communities in which they operate" (Fink, 2018).

Scholarly interest in the areas of sustainability, stakeholder relationships, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) has also increased considerably in recent years. Each of these areas has flourished and has provided seminal theoretical insights and empirical findings. Research on sustainability has sought to

understand the factors that explain the adoption and disclosure of sustainability practices, and their impact on environmental performance of firms (see [Bansal & Song, 2017](#), for a recent review). Research on stakeholder relationships has built on the theoretical foundations of stakeholder theory to identify conceptually meaningful differences among heterogeneous stakeholder groups ([Agle, Mitchell, & Sonnenfeld, 1999](#); [Rowley, 1997](#)) and to demonstrate that firms must attend to these multiple stakeholder groups to be able to generate and capture value ([Donaldson & Preston, 1995](#); [Freeman, 1984](#); [Henisz, Dorobantu, & Nartey, 2014](#)). Research on CSR has focused on the relationship between social performance and financial performance of firms (see [Orlitzky, Schmidt, & Rynes, 2003](#); [Wang, Tong, Takeuchi, & George, 2016](#), for reviews) and on the multi-level factors that may account for the adoption of CSR practices by different organizations ([Aguilera, Rupp, Williams, & Ganapathi, 2007](#)).

Notwithstanding these significant advances, research in these three streams has developed largely independently of the others and relatively little work examines the theoretical or empirical connections between the concepts that occupy center stage in each of these research areas. As such, fundamental questions are met, at best, by tentative answers. For example, are sustainability and CSR overlapping or complementary constructs? Are they two sides of the same coin, or is one substantive and the other mostly symbolic, as many practitioners believe? How does stakeholder engagement intersect with sustainability and CSR practices, or is it a different strategic area altogether? As academics interested in one or more of these three areas, are we truly studying different phenomena, or are these areas of research more interconnected than previously emphasized?

The present volume contemplates the connections among sustainability, stakeholder governance, and CSR to consider the fundamental questions that underlie and tie research across these areas together. Rather than seeking to offer comprehensive reviews of each of the topics, the chapters included in this volume provide a stimulating overview of new research situated at the intersections of the topics of this volume – sustainability, stakeholder governance, and CSR. Moreover, the chapters bring three emergent themes to light, which connect research cutting across the three topics in interesting ways. First, several chapters propose that a firm's owners are not only important stakeholders themselves, but also important factors in understanding a firm's overall strategy for engaging other stakeholders and its inclination to prioritize sustainability and social responsibility. Second, a theme that cuts across multiple chapters highlights that the level of alignment among stakeholders and the existent or potential coalitions among them are likely to influence firms' sustainability and CSR practices and industry-level practices. Third, several chapters discuss and show how the key concepts associated with the topics of this volume – sustainability, stakeholder governance, and CSR – and firms' practices in these areas have evolved over time, suggesting that a better understanding of dynamics and changes over time is critical within and across all three areas of research.

We leveraged these three emergent themes as the organizing structure for the volume. The resulting sequence of chapters starts with an emphasis on the firm as the level of analysis in the first part of the volume ("Ownership and Its

Implications for Sustainability, Stakeholder Governance, and CSR”) shifts to a focus on various stakeholders of the firm and the interdependencies among them in the second part of the volume (“Stakeholder Alignment and Coalitions”), and concludes by shifting attention to changes over time (“Dynamic Evolution of Concepts and Industry Practices”). We discuss each of these themes and highlighted some of the insights and contributions of each chapter. We close our introductory chapter by suggesting some possible directions for future research.

OWNERSHIP AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABILITY, STAKEHOLDER GOVERNANCE, AND CSR

Ownership is a fundamental construct in economics and strategy research. Scholars have built extensively on property rights theory (Alchian, 1965; Demsetz, 1967; Hart, 1995; Hart & Moore, 1990) and the related agency theory (Jensen & Meckling, 1976) as well as on transaction cost economics (Williamson, 1985) to explain the boundaries of the firm and the governance of exchanges between economic agents. In the first chapter in this section, titled “Stakeholders and Corporate Social Responsibility: An Ownership Perspective,” Peter Klein and Nicolai Foss propose that an understanding of ownership is similarly central to discussions of stakeholder relationships and CSR. They argue that assigning ownership to equity holders is an efficient mode of economic organization because equity holders have high “ownership competence” and highly aligned interests, reducing the costs of coordination among them. By contrast, other stakeholder groups (e.g., employees or local communities) have lower competence to exercise ownership, and are more likely to diverge in their preferences with regard to the strategic course of firms.

As such, Klein and Foss argue that owners may only delegate control rights of the firm to managers but retain decision rights of how to allocate residual income to CSR or philanthropic activities. While the core argument of their chapter reinforces the view proposed by Friedman (1970), Klein and Foss also include the possibility that managers may pursue “enlightened value maximization” by devoting firm resources to improve stakeholder relationships through CSR. The chapter’s emphasis on interest alignment across different stakeholder groups also foreshadows the second emergent theme in this volume: stakeholder alignment and coalitions.

The following three chapters examine some of the implications of differences in ownership. In “Public versus Private Firms: Energy Efficiency, Toxic Emissions and Abatement Spending,” Rachele Sampson and Maggie Zhou use US facility-level data between 1980 and 2009 to explore how a firm’s ownership – and therefore differences in managers’ time horizons and pressures to prioritize shareholder over other stakeholders’ interests – affect environmental behaviors and outcomes of a firm. They show that although publicly owned facilities have, on average, lower toxic emissions, facilities switching from private to public ownership become less energy efficient and spend less on pollution

abatement than their privately owned counterparts. Sampson and Zhou attribute this effect to the pressures placed by investors on managers to shift focus away from investments intended to improve energy and environmental outcomes, because the returns on such investments are uncertain or take a long time to be realized.

In “The Interdependence of Public and Private Stakeholder Influence: A Study of Political Patronage and Corporate Philanthropy in China,” Nan Jia, Jing Shi, and Yongxiang Wang propose that ownership differences between publicly traded and privately held (unlisted) firms also affect how firms think about the benefits associated with political connections (or patronage) and corporate philanthropy. They analyze a dataset that includes both publically traded and unlisted private firms in China and uncover that political patronage and corporate philanthropy are negatively associated for unlisted firms but positively associated for listed firms. Politically patronized firms face higher pressures from stakeholders to engage in corporate philanthropy, and the pressure is higher for publicly listed firms. These findings emphasize that significant interdependencies exist among firms’ various stakeholders. In addition, they highlight that different non-market strategies (e.g., political patronage, lobbying, and corporate philanthropy) may be either substitutes or complements and are best studied jointly.

In the last chapter of this section, “State-Owned Multinationals and Drivers of Sustainability Practices: An Exploratory Study of National Oil Companies,” Andrew Inkpen and Kannan Ramaswamy extend the emergent theme of ownership’s implications for sustainability, stakeholder governance, and CSR by considering the role of state ownership. To understand why some national oil companies (NOCs) address sustainability issues more comprehensively than others, the authors develop a new sustainability index for this industry that seeks to capture companies’ awareness of key sustainability issues, their practices, and their performances in these domains. The preliminary findings presented in this chapter suggest that these state-owned firms are more likely to adopt environmental standards and monitoring practices when their ownership is diffused beyond state owners and shared with different types of owners and investors.

The focus on state ownership and the need to consider the state’s multiple objectives and stakeholders also provides a perfect transition to the section that follows. Managers of NOCs and other state-owned enterprises know that the government must reconcile the need for increased revenues, jobs, and the protection of the country’s environment. The equation is a complex one, and the degree of alignment among different stakeholders and existing or potential coalitions among them become critical considerations. The chapters in the following section highlight how these play out for firms in similarly complex stakeholder landscapes.

STAKEHOLDER ALIGNMENT AND COALITIONS

In this section of the volume, authors tackle some of the complexities of stakeholder theory, showing us that while certain stakeholder groups support companies’ sustainability initiatives and practices, other stakeholder groups might

make it more difficult for a firm to make progress on sustainability issues, while others are, perhaps, largely indifferent. Thus, the chapters in this section are helpful in clarifying how a more nuanced view of the stakeholder landscape can shed light on some of the forces that might both facilitate and impede progress on issues related to environmental sustainability and CSR.

In their chapter titled “Governing the Void between Stakeholder Management and Sustainability,” Michael Barnett, Irene Henriques, and Bryan Husted propose that the field of management should revisit the role of the government in shaping firm incentives when dealing with “wicked” issues such as environmental protection. Barnett, Henriques, and Husted argue that the typical focus on firms’ stakeholders overlooks the fact that stakeholders pursue their own, sometimes short-sighted, best interests and that the natural environment has no stakeholder. For instance, employees may care about the environment but even more so about their wages, so firms are more likely to keep employees happy by paying higher wages than dealing with pollution that does not immediately affect employees’ health. More broadly, attending to stakeholder concerns might distract the firm away from dealing with sustainability issues, a risk that is likely to be exacerbated when stakeholders interests are also highly aligned (e.g., employees, the surrounding local community, and government regulators are all focused on wages and working conditions, and considerably less on environmental pollution). To overcome such possible “wicked” situations, the authors propose to bring the government back into the scholarly conversations about sustainability and stakeholder engagement.

In the chapter that follows, “Venture Capital’s Role in Creating a More Sustainable Society: The Role of Exits in Clean Energy’s Investment Growth,” Ari Ginsberg and Alfred Marcus provide a powerful illustration of how the incentives of one stakeholder group – specifically, those of venture capital (VC) fund managers – shape the ability of firms to find solutions to concerns of environmental sustainability. Ginsberg and Marcus show that VCs are only likely to invest in clean energy technologies when their past performance substantially exceeded that of their peers and that VCs are likely to decrease such investments when their past performance only moderately outpaced that of their peers. These findings highlight how the incentives of one stakeholder group might limit the ability of firms to develop sustainable energy solutions and therefore make overall progress towards the large-scale adoption of clean energy solutions. The authors also reflect on the importance of considering alternative sources of funding (including government funding) for clean energy technologies.

In the chapter “CSR Strategic Implementation in MNEs: The Role of Subsidiaries’ Stakeholders,” Anne Jacqueminet and Lilach Trabelsi develop a conceptual framework to examine how alignment across *and* within different stakeholder groups – local, global, and corporate parent stakeholders – influence the adoption and implementation of CSR practices in multinational corporations. The authors draw on research on stakeholder governance and global strategy to build a set of propositions on how the diversity of stakeholder pressures, the distance from the multinational’s home country, and the subsidiaries’ network embeddedness affect their implementation of CSR initiatives. Jacqueminet and

Trabelsi's propositions emphasize that stakeholder demands can converge and diverge not only across stakeholder groups (local vs global stakeholders) but also *within* stakeholder groups (e.g., different local stakeholders), suggesting that future research needs to carefully consider not only a range of stakeholder groups but also the degree of alignment or conflict between them.

In the chapter "Large Corporations, Social Capital and Community Philanthropy," Matthew Lee and Christopher Marquis propose that the effects of large corporations on community philanthropy are both direct, through participation in community philanthropy, and indirect, through their influence on community-level social capital. They analyze almost five decades (1952–1997) of United Way's contributions across cities in the United States to conclude that the presence of large corporations weakens the contributions to community philanthropy of both elites and the working class. In contrast to previous chapters of this section, which explore how the presence and alignment of stakeholder pressures affect *firm*-level social and environmental practices, Lee and Marquis' chapter shows that the presence of large companies affects the behavior of other stakeholder groups, such as the elite and working class individuals in the local community, nicely highlighting the connections between the behaviors of market and nonmarket actors located in the same geographical space.

In the chapter "Re-Thinking the CSPCFP Linkage: Analyzing the Mechanisms Involved in Translating Socially-Responsible Behavior to Financial Performance," Afshin Mehrpouya and Imran Chowdhury revisit the relationship between corporate social performance (CSP) and corporate financial performance (CFP). While extensive prior research has examined this relationship, empirical studies offer mixed results. The authors' framework emphasizes the multiplicity of underlying mechanisms and the interdependencies among multiple actors in different institutional settings, providing insights that are largely consistent with mixed findings on the CSP–CFP relationship. This chapter highlights the importance of understanding contextual contingencies in any study of sustainability, stakeholder governance, and CSR, and therefore exposes multiple opportunities for future research in these areas.

DYNAMIC EVOLUTION OF CONCEPTS AND INDUSTRY PRACTICES

The theme that unites the last set of chapters in our volume emphasizes change and the evolution of concepts and practices as reflected in both academic thinking about the issues in the arenas of sustainability, stakeholder management, and CSR, and in the thinking and business practices embraced by executives and various stakeholders of firms. In the chapter "Naturalizing Sustainability: How Industry Actors Make Sense of a Threatening Concept," Jean-Baptiste Litrico and Mary Dean Lee examine how external legitimacy judgements interact with internal identity beliefs to shape conceptions of sustainability in the civil aviation industry. The authors build on extensive ethnographic observations at industry events and multiple interviews with key stakeholders to suggest that, over time, the industry has interpreted the concept of sustainability through a

process of naturalization through which industry actors forged conceptual ties to past practices to create resonance between the new concept (sustainability) and the industry ethos. The authors describe and illustrate in detail the mechanisms through which the process of naturalization has unfolded in response to both external legitimacy threats and concerns from internal stakeholders.

In the chapter “Doing Well by Doing Good: A Comparative Analysis of ESG Standards for Responsible Investment,” Emily Barman reflects on the differences between different sets of environmental, social, and governance (ESG) standards and their evolution over time. Barman observes that some ESG standards are limited to business activities that pertain to the creation and capture of financial value, while others expand ESG principles to encompass a commitment to sustainability and the good treatment of stakeholders and the environment. These differences, Barman suggests, can be explained by understanding the cognitive schema that dominated each set of standards at the time when they were developed.

In the chapter “The Effect of Market and Nonmarket Competition on Firm and Industry Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR),” Olga Hawn and Hyoung-Goo Kang examine how competitive pressures among firms affect both firm-level and industry-level CSR. Companies such as Coca-Cola and PepsiCo compete not only in the product market but also in the domains of sustainability and social responsibility. The more a company invests in this space, the more likely it is for its competitors to do the same, possibly leading to shifts of CSR investment at the industry level. Using both firm-level and industry-level analyses, the authors find that higher CSR among a firm’s competitors is likely to increase a firm’s own CSR – in other words, CSR is “contagious” within an industry. Interestingly, however, the authors also find that greater intensity of industry-level competition does not translate into higher industry-level CSR because, in equilibrium, higher competition in an industry puts pressure on *all* firms to reduce production output and therefore their investments in sustainability and CSR domains.

In the chapter “Gone with the wind: The Evolving Influence of Social Movements and Counter Movements on Entrepreneurial Activity in the U.S. Wind Industry,” Chad Carlos, Wesley Sine, Brandon Lee, and Heather Haverman evaluate the evolution of the wind power industry in the United States over 15 years (1992–2007) to describe how social movements shaped the evolution of this new industry. They argue and show empirically that social movements’ support for a new industry increased resource availability for entrepreneurial firms and therefore for a new entry, diminishing the need for the movements’ continued efforts. The authors also propose that the efforts of a social movement are likely to lead to the rise of a countermovement. It is quite possible, then, that the persistence of the initial social movement may be best explained by the need to counter the countermovement than by its initial role of creating market infrastructure for a new industry to take roots and grow.

In the final chapter in this volume, “The Association between Ethics and Stakeholder Theory,” Don Lange and Jonathan Bundy discuss the relationship between ethics/moral reasoning and stakeholder theory. The authors propose

that stakeholder theory does not directly derive from the moral obligations of the business, and that business purpose is a mediating factor in the relationship between the two. The authors further argue that “CSR describes management decisions and the business’s activities that have implications or that are motivated by perceived moral obligations, but that fall outside of the management decisions and business activities that are oriented toward enabling the business to fulfill its business purpose,” reinforcing the original idea that stakeholder theory is a theory of management rather than one of business ethics, sustainability or CSR. This chapter offers a clear differentiation between the scope of the domains of stakeholder management, CSR and, to some extent, sustainability. And while some readers may disagree with how the lines have been drawn in the sand, this chapter is a much-needed contribution to the conversation on how sustainability, stakeholder governance, and CSR are defined and understood theoretically.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The collection of research in this volume provides a range of fascinating insights at the intersection of the three topics of this volume – sustainability, stakeholder governance, and CSR. The focus across the different chapters on the role of ownership, stakeholder alignment, and temporal dynamics revealed three emergent themes as well as many exciting and promising paths for future research.

Equally interesting to us as an editorial team is that despite the increasing attention devoted by both scholars and practitioners to the subjects of sustainability, stakeholder governance and CSR, a wide range of important questions is yet to be explored in these fields. For example, one intriguing area for further research lies in improving our understanding of how CEOs, top management teams (TMTs), and boards of directors think about issues relating to CSR, sustainability, and stakeholder management. Clearly, stakeholder actions can propel conciliatory actions on the part of corporations that fear PR nightmares but what are the factors that might cause a TMT or board to decide to be proactive in moving beyond conversations about sustainability and CSR to serious actions? For example, what is the role of the board or TMT composition (Chin, Hambrick, & Trevino, 2013; Hambrick & Mason, 1984; Tang, Qian, Chen, & Shen, 2015) in understanding a firm’s inclinations with respect to sustainability, CSR, and stakeholder governance? Some preliminary research suggests that boards with more women on them tend to score higher on various measures of CSR (Bear, Rahman, & Post, 2010) but we don’t understand why this might be the case. Some scholars have suggested that women may have more of a relationship orientation to business, which could be associated with placing a higher priority on environmental and social sustainability but at present, there is need for more research on the mechanisms that link TMT or board composition to decision making in the areas of stakeholder governance, sustainability, or CSR.

Another important area for future research lies in developing our understanding of how a firm’s commitment to stakeholders and sustainability change the structure or day-to-day practices of a firm. For example, the choices that are

made about where to place the organization's sustainability and CSR functions within its structure may be very important in determining how integrated these initiatives are in the organization (Marquis & Lee, 2013) and how much progress is made, but we know relatively little about how structure affects practices in the areas of CSR, sustainability, and stakeholder management.

Similarly, as others (e.g., Morgeson, Aguinis, Waldman, & Siegel, 2013) have argued, it would also be useful to pay more attention to the microprocesses by which employees' attitudes and behaviors might be affected by an organization's initiatives in the CSR, sustainability, and stakeholder management arenas. For example, there is some evidence that employees' engagement and productivity increase when firms pursue CSR or sustainability initiatives, in the organizational behavior literature (e.g., Albdour & Altarawneh, 2012; Glavas & Piderit, 2009; Rupp, Ganapathi, Aguilera, & Williams, 2006; Rupp, Shao, Thornton, & Skarlicki, 2013), and relatively recently, in the strategy literature (e.g., Bode, Singh, & Rogan, 2015; Burbano, 2016; Carnahan, Kryscynski, & Olson, 2017), but it would be good to show how these microlevel processes impact on firm financial performance and to better understand variance across industry contexts in the degree to which CSR and sustainability initiatives really matter in influencing employee's attitudes and productivity.

Future research could also seek a more systemic understanding of who captures the value created through sustainability and CSR initiatives. Prior studies have shown that the sustainability and CSR initiatives enhance firm profit, suggesting that, on average, firms appropriate value from these activities. But we still know little about whether society captures some of the value created and how much. Towards this end, a small but growing body of recent work has sought to refocus attention on the social impact of CSR activities (Ballesteros, Useem, & Wry, 2017), emphasizing, in particular, the potential disconnect between the financial benefits of CSR activities and their welfare impact (Asmussen & Fosfuri, 2017; Barnett, 2016; Horvath & Powell, 2016; Kaul & Luo, 2018a; Singh, Teng, & Netessine, 2017).

A focus on social impact and welfare also suggests a broader need to think more carefully about how value is created and distributed among different stakeholders through sustainability and CSR initiatives. To what extent can we readily apply the existing value-creation/value capture framework (Brandenburger & Stuart, 1996; Capron & Chatain, 2008; Garcia-Castro & Aguilera, 2015; Lieberman, Balasubramanian, & Garcia-Castro, 2018; Lieberman, Garcia-Castro, & Balasubramanian, 2016) to studying sustainability and CSR initiatives? What assumptions and elements of the framework need to be adapted if any? Important theoretical explorations have emerged in recent years by employing cooperative game theory to analyze stakeholder interactions (Burbano & Ostler, 2017) or by connecting stakeholder theory with value-based strategy (Bacq & Aguilera, 2018). Relatedly, future research should also consider how different organizational forms and institutional arrangements enable firms to create and capture values through these activities (Dorobantu, Kaul, & Zelner, 2017; Kaul & Luo, 2018b; Kivleniece & Quelin, 2012; Mahoney, McGahan, & Pitelis, 2009; Quélin, Kivleniece, & Lazzarini, 2017).

At the same time, there is much to be learned from putting on an international business lens and examining two key dimensions: (1) how multinational corporations' (MNCs') sustainability practices, stakeholder governance, and CSR unfold as these global organizations navigate across countries or (2) how firms differ in these three pillars across countries. While our volume includes one chapter addressing deployment of CSR within multinationals (Jacqueminet & Trabelsi, this volume) and an analytical comparison of oil MNCs' sustainability practices across countries (Inkpen & Ramaswamy, this volume), many research questions remain unanswered.

Among them, one fruitful avenue for future research is to explore how MNCs adjust (downgrade or upgrade) their CSR, stakeholder governance, and sustainability practices to either bond with stronger institutions or pursue arbitrage. The debate is wide open on what multinationals seek to accomplish and how it relates to the subsidiary's country regulation, firm legitimation, and overall efforts to fill in institutional voids. Jackson and Rathert (2017) claim that MNC subsidiaries might compensate for poorly developed social protection or limited statehood when it comes to CSR practices. Similarly, several empirical studies have pointed to the contingencies from the host country point of view in terms of how investing in CSR, sustainability practices, and stakeholder governance can enhance healthy competitiveness (Campbell, Eden, & Miller, 2012; Rathert, 2016). The arguments get even more complex when we move into emerging markets (Marano, Tashman, & Kostova, 2017; Zhang & Luo, 2013) or analyze the entire global supply chain (Kim & Davis, 2016). The missing link continues to be the relationship between CSR practices, sustainability efforts, and stakeholder governance, and the research question is to what degree these three pillars need to be closely aligned to be effective.

Equally importantly, comparative capitalism has devoted a fair amount of effort to unpack how CSR, sustainability practices, and stakeholder governance independently compare across countries, with the most work done in CSR. Stakeholder governance has a long tradition within comparative corporate governance as part of the coordinated institutions research (Aguilera & Jackson, 2003). The main questions are whether these three pillars that have occupied our volume are a mirror or a substitute for country-level institutional arrangements, and to what degree country-level institutions support or deter these managerial practices (El Ghouli, Guedhami, & Kim, 2017; Hotho & Saka-Helmhout, 2017; Jackson & Apostolakou, 2010; Matten & Moon, 2008; to cite just a few). Unpacking these questions further would require revisiting ideas about implicit/explicit practices, substantive/symbolic practices, and internal/external stakeholders practices. The main challenge, however, seems to be conceptual clarity, especially with regard to identifying how CSR, sustainability, and stakeholder governance are defined in each country; in colloquial terms, we need to compare apples with apples. To this end, future research building on field work and ethnography could provide important insights, as nicely exemplified in the chapters by Barman and Litrico and Dean Lee in this volume.

Furthermore, an interesting old debate that might require additional attention is the asymmetry between corporate responsibility and irresponsibility

(Jackson et al., 2014) and the array of behaviors (including greenwashing) and compulsory national policies lying in the gray areas between them. Future research would be well served to explore how responsible (and irresponsible) practices translate when adopted across countries with different institutional environments.

The journey of exploring, through the contributors to this volume, the theoretical and empirical connections between sustainability, stakeholder governance, and CSR has been a fascinating one. It provided surprising insights on some of the theoretical and empirical links between these three fast-growing but largely disjointed areas of research. Many of the studies in this volume highlight that business decisions relating to sustainability and CSR are ultimately decisions about the governance of stakeholder relations, and therefore propose that work in these areas should consider more closely both the firm and its stakeholders as strategic actors driving firm decisions. Ownership and stakeholder alignment – two of the emergent themes in this volume – play a critical role in explaining how firms approach the domains of sustainability, stakeholder relations, and CSR. And, unsurprisingly, how we think about and what firms do (and do not do) in these areas has changed considerably over time – and will most likely continue to change in the years ahead. Understanding these dynamics – the third emergent theme in the volume – has already provided and will likely continue to provide new insights into these topics.

Yet, in our view, the journey is only at its beginning. A wide range of interesting and relevant questions at the intersection of the areas of sustainability, stakeholder governance, and CSR are yet to be answered. We are hopeful that the interest in these questions will continue to grow and that the contributions to this volume will provide stepping stones for future scholarship at this scholarly intersection. We are also hopeful that this volume will encourage scholars across these related areas to learn from each other, collaborate, and thus continue this journey together.

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