

Reflections on the 2018 Decade Award

The Meaning and Dynamics of Corporate Social Responsibility

Matten, Dirk ; Moon, Jeremy

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2018 DECADE AWARD INVITED ARTICLE

REFLECTIONS ON THE 2018 DECADE AWARD: THE MEANING AND DYNAMICS OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

DIRK MATTEN
York University

JEREMY MOON
Copenhagen Business School

We reflect on our 2008 article, “‘Implicit’ and ‘Explicit’ CSR: A Conceptual Framework for a Comparative Understanding of Corporate Social Responsibility,” first recalling its origins. We contextualize this reflection piece with a stylized interpretation of CSR “then” (the turn of the twenty-first century) and “now” (2019). We then focus on two themes: CSR’s meaning and its dynamics. Regarding the meaning of CSR, we indicate the advantages of our capacious CSR definition and elaborate on the underlying theorization of our CSR framework regarding corporations’ need for legitimacy with their core stakeholders, societies they operate in, and regulators they are subject to. We propose that the configuration of these legitimacy relationships informs the nature and balance of implicit and explicit CSR. Turning to CSR dynamics, we build on research on the hybridization of implicit and explicit CSR and explore two underlying phenomena—explicitization and implicitization of CSR. We conceptualize explicitization as the process by which norms and rules associated with implicit CSR are adopted in explicit CSR policies, practices, and strategies. We conceptualize implicitization of CSR as the process by which norms and rules of business responsibility are informed by what were hitherto explicit CSR policies, practices, and strategies of corporations, and are built into general obligations of business.

Our reflections on “‘Implicit’ and ‘Explicit’ CSR: A Conceptual Framework for a Comparative Understanding of Corporate Social Responsibility” (Matten & Moon, 2008) were reanimated when the *AMR* editor’s email advising us that the article had won *AMR*’s 2018 Decade Award appeared in our in-boxes. This brought surprise, excitement, and a sense of honor, as well as some puzzlement: “There must be something wrong with the

system?!” Our next reflective mood was one of celebration, and we organized a party at a favorite Chicago jazz bar during the 2018 Academy of Management annual meeting. This brought together colleagues who had suffered the early formulations of our ideas, who had shared in the pleasure of the original publication, or who had simply encouraged our work. The party also brought questions prompting further reflections on the origins of the article:

This invited essay reflects on our 2008 article, “‘Implicit’ and ‘Explicit’ CSR: A Conceptual Framework for a Comparative Understanding of Corporate Social Responsibility,” given the *AMR* 2018 Decade Award. We have had positive and challenging reviews of an earlier draft of this essay from Tom Donaldson, Arno Kourula, and Andreas Rasche; feedback and advice on legitimacy from Patrick Haack; feedback from and discussion with Steen Vallentin; and feedback from Andrew Pilkington. We would like to thank those who discussed some of our earlier reflections at the 2017 EGOS Annual Colloquium “Sub-theme 01: Capitalism, Corporations and Society,” Copenhagen Business School, and at the 2019 TABEC Conference, Rutgers University (Matten & Moon, in press). Responsibility for any errors and shortcomings lies with the authors.

Q: How did you work on this?

A: We were working together at the International Centre for Corporate Social Responsibility, Nottingham University Business School, which provided a fertile atmosphere for thinking about CSR.

Q: What motivated you?

A: Interesting, since this is a theory paper motivated by our engagement with the world of practice that we witnessed at conferences of European business leaders discussing CSR. We were puzzled by the way these European leaders were defining their responsibilities in ways we had associated with North American business.

Q: What was the *AMR* review and revision process like?

A: It seemed a little slow to start with, and we discovered that the paper (it was literally a "paper" submission to the *AMR*) was lost to Hurricane Katrina! It was found, fortunately (we think via one of the reviewers). The review process was challenging and encouraging, with very helpful guidance from the associate editor, Tom Donaldson.

Given that the article is an institutional one, it was also interesting to reflect on one thing we took for granted: the ability to discuss and ponder our ideas in a bar after work! Neither of us had children at the time. This is not to wish our children away; far from it! Rather, it is to acknowledge the feminist observation that care for family members changes the terms of professional engagement.

We had the opportunity for further reflection on the article in the context of media interviews once the news was out.¹ We were asked why we thought the article had had such a big impact. We summarized this as follows:

- it enables analysis of CSR in various national settings and provides an explanation of different national approaches;
- in particular, it explains historic differences between U.S. and European CSR;
- it enables analysis of dynamic features of CSR (e.g., reflecting institutional change, specifically globalization); and
- it enables understanding of why European and other non-U.S. companies had recently adopted explicit CSR strategies.

In this reflection piece we augment the analysis of the 2008 article for the purpose of better understanding the *meaning* and the *dynamics* of CSR. Understanding the meaning and dynamics of any concept is important for its analysis and communication about that analysis. It is especially important for concepts like CSR, which have been described as "essentially contested" (for the concept in general, see Gallie, 1955–1956; for CSR, see Moon, Crane, & Matten, 2004, and Okoye, 2009), where there is uncertainty about its meaning and, thus, about distinguishing change in that concept from the emergence of a different concept. Or, more prosaically, there is a problem that CSR "means something but not always the same thing to everybody" (Votaw, 1972: 25). As a result, researchers,

policy makers, and practitioners can be talking past one another about CSR.

This reflection piece continues as follows. First, we provide a stylized interpretation of CSR "then" and "now." This introduces key developments in CSR for those for whom this is not a core research area. It also illustrates the importance of focusing on the meaning and dynamics of CSR, because it details changes in CSR that some analysts describe as inconsistent with earlier definitions of CSR and as altogether different concepts.

Second, we explore the meaning of CSR. We elaborate on the definition of CSR that we adopted in the 2008 article and compare it with other CSR definitions. We rehearse and substantiate the theory underlying our conceptualization of CSR with reference to the need for corporations to secure three sorts of legitimacy: with their own core stakeholders, with the societies they operate in, and with the regulators they are subject to. In this light, we provide further background to our thinking, distinguish it from other approaches, and clarify some misunderstandings about our implicit-explicit CSR framework.

Third, we show how the meaning of CSR that we adopt, and specifically the implicit-explicit conceptualization, sheds light on dynamic aspects of CSR. We do this by focusing on the "hybridization" of implicit and explicit CSR highlighted by other researchers. We identify two key processes underlying this hybridization. First, we explore the *explicitization* of CSR, in which norms and rules that had implicitly operated to guide business responsibility to society have become more explicit (i.e., included in individual corporations' explicit CSR). Second, we consider how the *implicitization* of CSR has caused corporations' explicit policies, strategies, and practices to be reflected in implicit assumptions about CSR in wider norms and regulations operating on corporations. As a result of these dynamics, we suggest that CSR reflects various and varying balances of explicit volition and implicit compliance.

In the discussion and conclusion section we summarize the contributions of this reflection piece, discuss some of their implications, and highlight limitations and avenues for further research.

CSR THEN AND NOW

Here we compare key characteristics of CSR in the period after the turn of the twenty-first century, when we began to formulate the 2008 article,

¹See, for instance, <https://cbswire.dk/cbs-professors-paper-is-the-most-cited-of-the-decade/>; <https://yfile.news.yorku.ca/2018/09/11/prestigious-award-honour-for-schulich-professor-dirk-matten/>.

with its current character. This introduces CSR to readers without expertise in the field. It also illustrates the significance of addressing the questions about the meaning of CSR (to distinguish it from other concepts) and about its dynamics (to distinguish “change” from “difference” and to understand the nature and explanation of change). We base this discussion around Table 1.

The first change we observe is in the context of explicit CSR. The 2008 article focused on CSR in the United States and Europe at a time of globalization. Although we made brief reference to CSR elsewhere, we did not envisage the multinational and international spread of CSR as evidenced by the nationalities of UN Global Compact organizations and by the growth of international CSR networks, associations, partnerships, multistakeholder initiatives (MSIs), and standards that companies join/adopt/use as reference points or comply with. While the national level still features prominently (Kolk, Kourula, Pisani, & Westermann-Behaylo, 2020), CSR is also evidenced internationally in numerous initiatives developed among MNCs seeking to legitimize themselves in home and host countries. One clear implication of this multinationalism and internationalization is that rumors of the “end of CSR” (Fleming & Jones, 2012) seem exaggerated.

The *issue focus* of CSR has also changed dramatically (Table 1). CSR issues around the turn of the century chiefly concerned the welfare of core

stakeholders (notably, employees and communities; Maignan & Ralston, 2002; Moon & Sochacki, 1996; Moore, Richardson, & Moon, 1985). CSR agendas now reflect the specificities of firm, sector, home, and host country contexts. Two further trends are instructive. First, many CSR issues are concerned with the wider responsibilities that companies take for some of their potential negative impacts in their supply chains and even their value chains (e.g., unsafe working conditions, slavery-like terms of employment, pollution, resource depletion). Second, many companies are increasingly focused on the impacts of their operations on the planet at large (e.g., policies related to climate change, species diversity, natural resource depletion; Bansal & DesJardine, 2014). Reflecting these developments, the term *corporate sustainability* has been adopted by some companies, and this has become a research focus in light of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (e.g., Whiteman, Walker, & Perego, 2013).

There have been important changes in the *business status* of CSR in the last two decades (Table 1). This has primarily reflected legitimacy strategies in relation to core stakeholders (i.e., expenditures within shareholder tolerance; contributions to communities who, in an industrial context, often included employees). The current business status of CSR more readily reflects corporate legitimacy strategies to societies more

TABLE 1
CSR Then and Now: A Stylized Interpretation of Prevalent Themes

CSR Characteristics	Then (Circa 2000)	Now (Circa 2020)
Location	U.S. home, with new shoots in Europe (also Asia)	Multinational, international
Issue focus	Issues related to core stakeholders	Issues related to core stakeholders, whole value chains, whole societies, planet
Business status	Mainly use of profits, giving back	Use of profits, how profits are made, value creation
Governance status	Mainly apart from government-led governance	Partner in multiactor private governance, entailed in government-led (national and international) governance regulation
Organizational status	“Complete organization”	“Integrated partial organization”
Modes	Philanthropy, partnerships	Philanthropy, innovation, self-/mutual regulation, standards and partnerships, MSIs, government regulation
Rationale	CSR enables use of corporate wealth for social ends	CSR enables use of corporate wealth for social ends; CSR enables business to be a vehicle for responsibility; CSR enables wealth creation
Institutional direction ^a	Unidirectional (i.e., explicitization)	Bidirectional and interactive (i.e., hybridization, explicitization, implicitization)

^a These changes are discussed in the section titled “The Dynamics of CSR.”

generally, illustrated by their attention to how profits are made (e.g., use of natural resources, emissions, supply chain employment standards) and wider value creation, for example, for “bottom of the pyramid strategies” (Mason, Chakrabarti, & Singh, 2017; Prahalad & Hart, 2002.).

Likewise, the *governance status* of CSR has shifted radically (Table 1). In part, this is because corporations have taken more responsibility for global governance in, for instance, MSIs (Matten & Crane, 2005; Scherer & Palazzo, 2007, 2011). But we also have seen closer entailment of governments in CSR regulation (Knudsen, Moon, & Slager, 2015; Kourula, Moon, Salles-Djelic, & Wickert, 2019; McBarnet, 2007) and with corporations and other private regulators in the cocreation of new governance systems (Bernstein & Cashore, 2007; Knudsen & Moon, 2017; Scherer, Rasche, Palazzo, & Spicer, 2016).

International governmental organizations (IGOs) increasingly regulate CSR (Abbot, Genschel, Snidal, & Zangl, 2015; Ruggie, 2002, 2004). The UN Global Compact (1999) enabled corporations to commit themselves to ten basic principles, mainly derived from international treaties (Rasche, 2009; Rasche & Waddock, 2014). The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been widely adopted by corporations in the management and communication of their policies. Other examples of IGO interest in CSR include the UN Principles for Responsible Investment, the UN Principles for Responsible Management Education, the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, the ASEAN CSR Network, and the numerous regulations and initiatives of the European Union.

There have also been changes in the *organizational status* of CSR (Table 1). CSR departments are more firmly established in corporations, more integrated, and more closely connected to board-level deliberations (Grayson & Kakabadse, 2013), as are issues of business ethics (Rasche, 2019). Moreover, the organization of CSR within corporations has shifted from “complete” to “partial” organization by corporations (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011). Thus, corporations have opened themselves to external actors—not only core stakeholders—in their adoption of CSR standards and their membership in CSR partnerships (Rasche, de Bakker & Moon, 2013). Such standards and partnerships reflect not only the interests and values of corporations’ core stakeholders but also those of competitors; civil society, labor, and professional organizations (e.g., accountants, biologists, health

scientists); and regulators at local, national, and international levels.

These changes in the business, governance, and organizational status of CSR are together reflected in the changing modes of CSR (Moon, Murphy, & Gond, 2017), or how CSR is enacted (Table 1). The most obvious shift here is from the predominance of philanthropy and local partnerships, evident especially in the United States (Maignan & Ralston, 2002), to national and international cross-sectoral partnerships (Seitanidi & Crane, 2014), standards (Gilbert, Rasche, & Waddock, 2011), and MSIs (de Bakker, Rasche, & Ponte, 2019).

This brings us to the changes in the *rationales* for CSR (Maignan & Ralston, 2002; Moon et al., 2017). A long-term assumption about CSR has been that surplus wealth could be deployed for social purposes, associated with paternalism or “noblesse oblige”; stewardship; and philanthropy (i.e., what corporations do with their profits). A clear new rationale is evidenced in the way that corporations increasingly present their business models as vehicles for social change (i.e., how they make their profits; Table 1). This was once associated with niche areas of business that were “born” with a social mission (e.g., The Body Shop, Ben & Jerry’s, Patagonia), but more mainstream corporations are now integrating CSR into their core business strategy (e.g., Unilever; see Lawrence, Rasche, & Kenny, 2015). This sense of social mission has often been justified with reference to its business benefits, a rationale renewed in light of the popularization of the concept of “creating shared value” (CSV; Porter & Kramer, 2011, but see critiques such as Crane, Palazzo, Spence, & Matten, 2014, and Vallentin & Spence, 2017). Many corporations have been exploring and communicating precisely that their CSR brings value to society and to their company (i.e., their core stakeholders). This form of rationalization has been illustrated both with respect to cost savings (e.g., from reducing negative omissions or lowering consumption of natural resources) and with respect to benefits such as more secure supply and new markets that CSR-based business models are expected to yield.

Many reinterpretations of CSR’s meaning over the last two decades reflect ways of accommodating the changes illustrated in Table 1. For example, Porter and Kramer (2011) and Scherer and Palazzo (2007, 2011) both illustrate CSR’s internationalization, the expansion of CSR issues to

societal agendas at large, and the progression of CSR from “use of profits” to “the making of profits.” Porter and Kramer do not appear to consider CSR’s changing governance status (if anything, they advocate bypassing government), organizational status, and modes, whereas Scherer and Palazzo recognize all three CSR dynamics.

However, in recognizing the changing business status and rationales (Table 1), Porter and Kramer argue that the phenomenon they identify, CSV—a business case for social investments based on a stakeholder model—is *different* from CSR. As we indicate below, our wider definition of CSR embraces not only CSV but also earlier policies, strategies, and practices reflecting the “business case for CSR” (e.g., Griffin & Mahon, 1997; Hart, 1995; Hart & Milstein, 2003). Indeed, this rationale was espoused two centuries ago by Robert Owen, founder of the cooperative movement, who argued that “fair treatment of workers could result in a return equal to 50 percent to 100 percent on money invested” (quoted in Husted, 2015: 127).

Scherer and Palazzo (2007, 2011) do not offer political CSR as something *wholly different* but, rather, as reflecting distinctive roles for corporations in global governance. We concur that their specific insight into CSR’s new global (or, perhaps, more usually “international”) governance roles is insightful and important (Crane, Matten, & Moon, 2008; Matten & Crane, 2005). Our main concern here is that naming this “political” CSR could lead the reader to overlook long-standing evidence that CSR brings political responsibilities at the local and national levels (Boswell, 1983; Husted, 2015; Moon, 1995; Moon et al., 2017; Moore et al., 1985).

So, our stylized interpretation of CSR then and now has illustrated some of the key questions and debates about CSR’s meaning (Table 1). Because of some of the changes we depict, Porter and Kramer (2011) argue for replacing CSR with another concept (creating shared value), and Scherer and Palazzo (2011 in particular) justify delineating a subconcept (political CSR). In our discussion of the meaning of CSR, we indicate why we think neither conceptual move is warranted, notwithstanding the value of the authors’ respective insights into key CSR dynamics.

THE MEANING OF CSR

In reflecting on the 2008 article’s contribution to the meaning of CSR, we note that our CSR

definition enables inductive analysis of CSR in its comparative and dynamic contexts. We now “backfill” some of our assumptions about CSR and legitimacy in the 2008 article by conceptualizing corporate motivations for legitimacy in the context of relationships between the corporation and, respectively, its core stakeholders,² societies the corporations operate in, and the regulators (public and private) the corporations are subject to. The relationships of corporations with these actors have a different and changing character, depending on institutional context, both in terms of *place* and *time*. But it is with these actors in their specific institutional contexts that corporations need legitimacy, and, we argue, CSR provides a means of securing such organizational legitimacy (Deephouse, Bundy, Tost, & Suchman, 2017; Durand, Hawn, & Ioannou, 2019).

Depending on the constellation of these actors and their institutional contexts, CSR might reflect compliance with societal norms or regulation (public or private) and be implicit, or it might reflect volition and be explicit. The success of these legitimacy strategies will be reflected in benefits to the corporation if the CSR is regarded positively (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Suchman, 1995). Thus, a positive assessment of the corporation’s CSR by its core stakeholders (e.g., as contributing to business performance) will be rewarded by further resources vital to business operation (notably, capital, labor, payments, input materials, products and services, and community approval). A positive assessment of the corporation’s CSR by societies in which the corporation operates will be reflected in the corporation’s benefiting from a general reputation as socially appropriate and thereby trustworthy, and from opportunities to be a social partner (e.g., with civil society organizations). A positive assessment of the corporation’s CSR by the regulators as congruent with their expectations will be reflected in favorable status in public procurement markets, access to markets in which private regulators have authority, and opportunities to participate in governance (e.g., public-private partnerships, policy-making

²We specify the corporation’s core stakeholders, recognizing that this introduces some conceptual ambiguity (the significance of which will reflect each reader’s preferred theory of the firm!). This is because we would expect corporations, like all organizations, to be motivated by self-interest, but that this would reflect the interests of their core stakeholders—even though these are not usually in perfect harmony (Freeman, Harrison, & Wicks, 2007).

processes, MSIs). Depending on how the particular balances of implicit and explicit CSR are evaluated by the corporation's core stakeholders and by societal and regulatory actors, the corporation may maintain, extend, or otherwise adjust the institutional character of its CSR (Figure 1).

The following section unfolds this argument and explains the components of and relationships within Figure 1.

The CSR Definition

Whereas Bowen (1953) began the modern conceptualization of business social responsibility with the *individual "businessman"* (see also Davis, 1960), which was followed by attention to the *individual organization* (e.g., Carroll, 1979; Heald, 1970), our 2008 definition also gave attention to the *societal context* of business responsibility. This focused on the roles of cultural norms and regulatory environments, as well as on actors beyond the core stakeholders, such as civil society and government.

We avoided defining CSR in a way that simply reflected the policies, strategies, and practices of a single context to allow the respective features and applications of CSR from different national business systems (NBSs) to speak for themselves. Thus, we offered a definition of CSR that was sufficiently capacious—or roomy—for inductive reasoning and analysis, particularly for analysis of *comparative* and *changing* CSR:

Thus, CSR (and its synonyms) empirically consists of [clearly articulated and communicated]³ policies and practices of corporations that reflect business responsibility for some wider societal good. Yet the precise manifestation and direction of the responsibility lie at the discretion of the corporation. (Matten & Moon, 2008: 405).

In this respect, our definition is therefore consonant with that of Bowen, who also defined CSR openly: "those policies, . . . those decisions, or . . . those lines of actions which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society" (1953: 6).

Our 2008 article's definition differs from conceptions of CSR that identify different actors to whom businesses are responsible, as in the many

CSR adoptions of the stakeholder model. For example, Waddock and Bodwell defined CSR as "the way in which a company's operating practices (policies, processes, and procedures) affect its stakeholders and the natural environment" (2004: 25).

Our definition also differs from those that specify CSR according to *what it is not*. For example, many definitions expressly distinguish CSR from corporate behavior that is shaped by the law and government or by business interest. For example, McWilliams and Siegel defined CSR as "actions that appear to further some social good, *beyond* the interests of the firm and that which is required by law" (2001: 117, *emphasis added*).

While other definitions recognize the importance of *context*, they also bring in specific elements that render the definition less capacious. For example, Aguinis defined CSR as "context-specific organizational actions and policies that take into account stakeholders' expectations and the triple bottom line of economic, social, and environmental performance" (2011: 855; a definition also adopted by Aguinis & Glavas, 2012, and Rupp, Williams, & Aquilera, 2010).

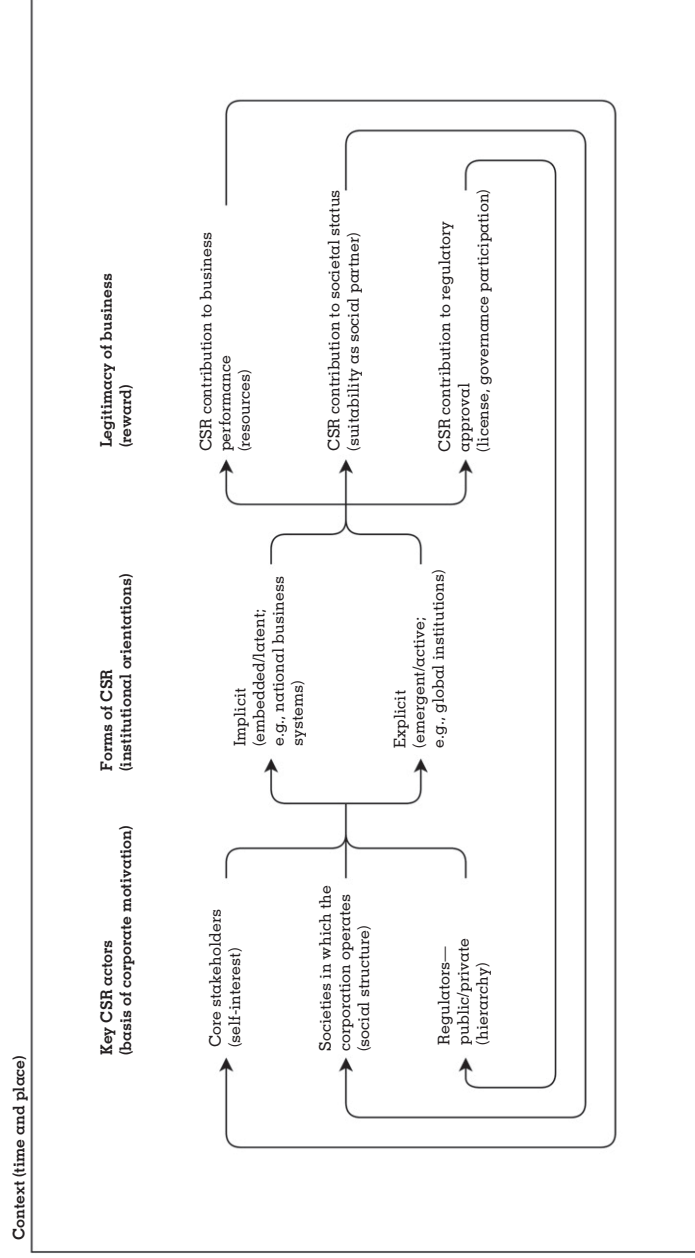
Our definition risks attracting the criticism that it does not serve research specifying variables in advance and, on the basis of their frequency, distribution, and correlations found, enables CSR to be traced, compared, and explained. However, our intention was to enable identification of CSR policies, strategies, and practices reflecting different locational and temporal contexts. Our definition also risks criticism that we do not distinguish "fake" (e.g., window dressing) from "real" CSR (e.g., the authentic embrace of societal values in policies, strategies, and practices). Our approach is designed to capture what corporations present as their CSR behavior. We do note in our underlying theory, however (Figure 1 and see below), that core stakeholders, societies, and regulators will evaluate and make judgments on the legitimacy of a corporation's CSR, which we now turn to.

Underlying Theory: Three Institutional Relationships

The theoretical underpinning of our approach to CSR is captured in the word "legitimacy," which was core to our 2008 conceptualization of CSR in national and new institutional contexts. Here we

³On reflection, we would drop this bracketed phrase since it leans too far toward the "explicit" form of CSR. We now prefer the definition without the "clearly articulated and communicated," which then equally applies to the explicit and implicit CSR forms.

FIGURE 1
A Model of Corporate Social Responsibility



follow Deephouse et al. and define organizational legitimacy as “the perceived appropriateness of an organization to a social system in terms of rules, values, norms and definitions” (2017: 32)

In the context of understanding CSR across time and place, we assume that a corporation’s CSR policies, strategies, and practices are developed for the purpose of “gaining, maintaining and repairing” legitimacy (Suchman, 1995: 571). We assume that this is in three distinct institutional relationships that are associated with the key actors corporations depend on for legitimacy and that therefore bring distinctive bases of motivation for corporate policy, strategy, and practice: *core stakeholders*, *society*, and *regulators*. This clearly differs from other perspectives on the question of who confers legitimacy. From a stakeholder perspective (e.g., Freeman, 2009/1984; Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997), core stakeholders, society, and regulators are all stakeholders of companies. We suggest that from a CSR perspective, these institutions have different types of relationships with the corporation, bring fundamentally different criteria to bear in such evaluations, and potentially bring different resources to the corporation and its CSR. We nonetheless concur with this literature that the task of corporations is to align these relationships (Freeman et al., 2007; Mitchell et al., 1997). The “organizational legitimacy” perspective simply distinguishes “internal” and “external” stakeholders as sources of legitimacy—or legitimacy evaluators—with analyses including a wide range of societal and regulatory actors (Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Deephouse et al., 2017; Deephouse & Suchman, 2008). Our aim is to delineate these legitimacy relationships in the case of CSR.

Drawing from the legitimacy literature, we assume that forms of CSR appropriate to the specific balance of key CSR actors (core stakeholders, societies, and regulators) in their respective context (place and time) will yield legitimacy as a “property” for the corporation (i.e., something that is a valued resource). This, in turn, will reflect interactive “processes” of the construction of CSR and “perceptions” of those legitimacy-giving actors (Suddaby, Bitektine, & Haack, 2017).

The first institutional relationships for corporations are with their core stakeholders (Freeman, 2009/1984). Notwithstanding the vast literature differentiating stakeholders, their relative priority, and the tensions in balancing these, our point is to distinguish core stakeholders from other

actors and to identify what unites them. We suggest that while other actors can affect and are affected by corporations, notwithstanding their distinctive perspectives, shareholders/owners, employees, customers and suppliers, and communities all have an interest in the corporation itself and its market success. Thus, they share an underlying interest in the corporation’s existence and prosperity and in bringing resources to that success (i.e., finance, labor, supply, custom; see Barney, 1991). The legitimacy that CSR affords with respect to these institutional relationships is through its contributions to company performance: with its shareholders/owners who derive dividends, with its employees who gain continued employment and remuneration, with customers who derive continued availability of products and services, with suppliers who benefit from continued business, and with communities whose social infrastructure benefits from company operations. This CSR capacity has become a point of increased interest for corporations in light of the rise of attention to it by investors (Friedea, Busch, & Bassen, 2015; O’Sullivan & O’Dwyer 2015), consumers (Reisch & Thøgersen, 2017), and employees (El Akremi, Gond, Swaen, De Roeck, & Igalens, 2018; Glavas, 2016; Jones, Willness, & Madey, 2014; Vlachos, Panagopoulos, & Rapp, 2014).

Turning to the second institutional relationship of corporations, as Polanyi (1957) noted, all markets are embedded in human societies, and, thus, corporations need to secure, maintain, and repair legitimacy in the different “social structures” (Granovetter, 1985) where they operate. We expect this to require broad conformance with and support for the values espoused or recognized by those societies (Boswell, 1983). This can include tailoring CSR to social expectations whether in nineteenth-century Europe and North America (Djelic & Etchanchu, 2017; Husted, 2015) or in contemporary United States (Carroll, Lipartito, Post, & Werhane, 2012; Maignan & Ralston, 2002) and Asia (Kim & Moon, 2015). In recent decades, specific elements of societal opinion have been represented—and mediated to corporations—by civil society organizations (den Hond & de Bakker, 2007; Seitanidi & Crane, 2014), often accentuated by media and social media involvement (Carroll, 2011; Ihlen, Bartlett, & May 2011). In some cases this societal interest reflects implicit assumptions about CSR as compliance, and in others it may reflect volition by corporations, whether to gain legitimacy (e.g., entering a new market), maintain

legitimacy (e.g., particularly in times of threats to the legitimacy of the corporation, the sector, or business more widely), or repair legitimacy (e.g., after a scandal; Pfarrer, DeCelles, Smith, & Taylor, 2008).

Third, as Polanyi (1957) noted, all markets are created in and maintained by governmental actions, from the specification of the corporate form and the rules of markets to the management of those markets. Governments enjoy a monopoly of legitimate coercion in their jurisdictions, which affords a special authority or "hierarchy" (Granovetter, 1985). These regulators define legal and otherwise codified or authoritative expectations of business responsibility (Kourula et al., 2019). They may thereby reflect, reinforce, and inform societal expectations of business, and they do so through their ability to make and apply standards and rules in their respective jurisdictions (Knudsen et al., 2015) and, in some cases, beyond their borders (Knudsen & Moon, 2017). This means that to secure legitimacy with these regulators, corporations, at the minimum, need to conform with their rules, but this can extend to enriching the objectives of regulators (McBarnet, 2007; Moon, 2002). In this way, corporations acquire and maintain their legal status, freedom from litigation, and a favorable standing with respect to public procurement and wider regulatory decisions.

But regulation is no longer the sole preserve of governments. The emergence of "new governance" (Moon, 2002; Pierre, 2000) over the last three decades or so has brought to the fore a myriad of nongovernmental regulators of corporations, be it through nonstate market governance (Cashore, 2002), standards organizations (Gilbert et al., 2011), or intermediary institutions (Brès, Mena, & Salles-Djelic, 2019). These have become an equally important source of legitimacy for many corporations (Scherer & Palazzo, 2007). One common characteristic of the new governance developments is their international character—especially in the form of MSIs (de Bakker et al., 2019), which tend to combine multiple corporations and civil society organizations. These new regulators therefore bear some hallmarks of the legitimacy relationship associated with governments but in the context of perceived new imperatives for legitimacy across borders (Haack, Pfarrer, & Scherer, 2014; Kostova, Roth, & Dacin, 2008; Kostova & Zaheer, 1999; Scherer, Palazzo, & Seidl, 2013).

A few points of clarification are warranted here. First, the order of the relationships presented is not intended to convey any necessary prioritization for corporations. We see the balance and nature of the prioritizations as entirely contextual. Second, the differentiation of the relationships is not to suggest that they are independent of one another. On the contrary, they are mutually shaping (Granovetter, 1985). Corporations can shape societal values (through the effects of their products and services; e.g., Whelan, 2017) and regulatory policy (through lobbying; e.g., Anastasiadis, 2014). Societies can inform corporate values (through social regulation; e.g., Boswell, 1983) and government priorities (the essentials of modern democratic theory; e.g., Dahl, 1956). Governments shape the very essence of corporations and their relationships with core stakeholders (Avi-Yonah, 2005). Third, corporations' valuation of these different relationships can change. For example, the U.S. Business Roundtable released a new "Statement on the Purpose of a Corporation" signed by 181 CEOs (see <https://opportunity.businessroundtable.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/BRT-Statement-on-the-Purpose-of-a-Corporation-with-Signatures.pdf>), superseding previous statements that had endorsed "shareholder primacy." It was described as promoting "an economy that serves all Americans," for "shared prosperity and sustainability for both business and society" and for "our country" (*Business Roundtable*, 2019).

To illustrate the significance of this underlying theory of institutional relationships, it is instructive to note that notwithstanding their other differences, the authors of CSV (Porter & Kramer, 2011) and political CSR (Scherer & Palazzo, 2007, 2011⁴) share the view that corporations need to secure greater social legitimacy. This resonates with the centrality of this legitimacy relationship in our underlying model of CSR (Figure 1). It should also be noted, though, that for Porter and Kramer (2011), this primarily represents an opportunity for increasing legitimacy with core stakeholders through greater profits, whereas for Scherer and Palazzo (2011), societal legitimacy represents something of an alternative orientation for corporate success to that of maximizing profits.

⁴We focus on Scherer and Palazzo (2007, 2011) and not the more recent Scherer, Rasche, Palazzo, and Spicer (2016), since the former present a more distinctive analysis of CSR.

With respect to legitimacy with regulators, however, these authors' perspectives take rather different turns. Porter and Kramer (2011) discount this relationship, seeing relationships with core stakeholders and with society as paramount and regarding corporations as offering an alternative source of problem-solving capacity both to governments and to NGOs. Scherer and Palazzo (2007, 2011) locate their articles in the context of what appear to be government-free spaces in which MNCs operate and which they also "fill," in collaboration with civil society organizations through MSIs. While recognizing the new contexts that CSR agendas bring for Western MNCs operating internationally, and that new collaborative institutions are indeed arising, we suggest that both views underestimate the imperatives for legitimacy relationships with governmental regulators in home and host countries (as noted in Scherer et al., 2016).

Implicit and Explicit CSR

Thus, corporations' legitimacy-seeking CSR policies, strategies, and practices reflect three institutional relationships. But the nature and balance of these institutional relationships can vary, often profoundly, according to their wider contexts and will therefore yield different configurations of implicit and explicit CSR.

In our 2008 article we first grounded this aspect of our analysis in the concept of NBSs (Whitley, 1997; see also Whitley, 1992, 1999, 2002a,b)⁵ to indicate that there are historically grounded national institutions that inform CSR. In these contexts, the expectations of CSR are embedded in and focused on companies in general (and on wider institutions), yielding *implicit* CSR. Our 2008 article illustrated this in the postwar European context, where the power of corporations and their core stakeholders was moderated by societal and governmental institutions. Other expectations of corporate responsibility are more overt and focused not only on business in general but also on individual corporations, yielding *explicit* CSR. The 2008 article illustrated this, first, in the U.S. NBSs, where corporations' power is more

accepted by society and less tempered by government than in the late-twentieth-century Western European context. In the United States, corporations take express and distinctive responsibility for issues relating to some stakeholders—notably, employees, consumers, and community members.

However, in the context of institutional changes emerging with globalization, our 2008 article drew attention to European corporations' adoption of more explicit forms of CSR. We grounded our analysis in the *new institutionalism* literature, which identified the emergence of homogeneous institutions that operate across national boundaries (i.e., through globalization) and their increasing significance in the respective organizational fields of corporations. These institutions shape the behavior of corporations through "coercive isomorphisms, mimetic processes and normative pressures" (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983: 147) and therefore deliver legitimacy to those corporations in new global spheres. Our 2008 article applied this framework to explain the increased adoption of explicit CSR policies, strategies, and practices by European MNCs. The article suggested that institutions embedded in NBSs and those in the organizational fields of corporations will shape corporate strategies for legitimacy, producing different and dynamic configurations of implicit and explicit CSR (Matten & Moon, 2008: 413, Figure 2).

Our original article described explicit CSR as "corporate policies that assume and articulate responsibility for some societal interest" and implicit CSR as "corporations' role within the wider *formal and informal institutions*" (Matten & Moon, 2008: 409). This distinction rested on

1. whether a corporation undertakes and expresses CSR alone (explicit) or as part of an institutional complex (implicit),
2. whether this CSR is presented in terms of the corporation voluntarily undertaking responsible activities (explicit) or adopted by the corporation to reflect wider values and regulations (implicit), and
3. whether the CSR motivations are primarily derived from core stakeholders (explicit) or from a wider and more institutionalized set of actors (implicit; Matten & Moon, 2008: 410, Table 1).

We presented the differences between the two manifestations of CSR in Table 1 of the 2008 article,⁶ reproduced here as Table 2.

⁵Others have deployed similar frameworks to distinguish different institutional contexts for CSR, such as *Varieties of Capitalism* (Hall & Soskice, 2001, as deployed for CSR analysis by Jackson & Bartosch, 2016; Jackson, Brammer, & Matten, 2012; Kang & Moon, 2012). See also Witt and Redding's (2013) variant of Asian business systems (which captures the institutional significance of subnational business systems).

⁶We also presented this in Figure 1 in the 2008 article, which is not replicated here.

TABLE 2
Explicit and Implicit CSR Compared

Explicit CSR	Implicit CSR
Describes corporate activities that assume responsibility for the interests of society	Describes corporations' role within the wider format and informal institutions for society's interests and concern
Consists of voluntary corporate policies, programs, and strategies	Consists of values, norms, and rules that result in (often codified and mandatory) requirements for corporations
Incentives and opportunities are motivated by the perceived expectations of different stakeholders of the corporation	Motivated by the societal consensus on the legitimate expectations of the roles and contributions of all major groups in society, including corporations

Source: Matten and Moon (2008: 410).

It has sometimes been assumed that we concluded that the U.S. NBSs had no implicit CSR and that the European ones had no explicit CSR. Certainly, we had envisaged this as a mainly inverse relationship: the more implicit the CSR of an NBS, the less attention corporations would need to give to explicit CSR, and vice versa. Nevertheless, we did not present implicit and explicit CSR as mutually exclusive. Rather, we saw them as ideal CSR types and assumed that both feature in national systems and in companies. We cited Pasquero (2004) to signal how U.S. CSR is embedded "in U.S. institutions and culture, particularly in the traditions of individualism, democratic pluralism, moralism, and utilitarianism" (Matten & Moon 2008: 409). Indeed, Figure 1 in our 2008 article does not present a pure inverse correlation of implicit and explicit CSR; rather, it is designed to indicate that we would expect a modicum of implicit and explicit CSR in all economic systems and all corporations. However, we argue below (in the section titled "The Dynamics of CSR") that the implicit and explicit forms of CSR are more interactive than we had originally appreciated.

A Framework of CSR

From our reflections on and development of the 2008 article, it has become evident that rather than just providing an alternative to or an extension of extant CSR theory, our framework exposes the general nature of CSR. It combines

1. the expectations of corporations' core stakeholders, societies, and regulators that corporate legitimacy would be contingent on, with
2. the specific contexts of corporations' operations (e.g., local, national, international, cultural, industry, value chain) in which they use CSR to secure, maintain, or increase legitimacy, with

3. the resultant forms of CSR, whether implicit (particularly reflecting societal and regulatory expectations of business—and other institutions—in general) or explicit (particularly reflecting core stakeholders' expectations of corporations in particular).

Circumstances of change (e.g., globalization for our 2008 article) unsettle the institutional orientation of CSR, provoke new legitimacy strategies, and bring new configurations of implicit and explicit CSR. But, as noted, there have been subsequent changes in CSR that we had not anticipated, whose implications for our implicit/explicit framework we turn to now.

THE DYNAMICS OF CSR

As indicated in our interpretation of CSR then and now (above), CSR is dynamic. And this is not a new observation: CSR has long been described as "a moving target" (Christensen, Morsing, & Thyssen, 2013: 372). Our purpose here is to reflect on some of the dynamics of CSR as depicted in Table 1 in light of the implicit-explicit CSR conceptualization presented in the 2008 article and the framework of CSR explicated above (Figure 1). First, we consider CSR change through the evidence of *hybridity* of implicit and explicit CSR; second, we explore the twin processes underlying this hybridization—namely, *explicitization* and *implicitization*. We present these terms in the bottom row of Table 1 and attempt to relate them to the other changes in CSR characteristics we have identified.

Hybridization of Explicit and Implicit CSR

We had not anticipated the extent and nature of hybridity in North America and Europe, let alone

more widely. Recent research has found that these processes are, to quote Hiss, not "radical, frictionless or uni-directional" but "unexpected, paradoxical and dialectical" (2009: 445). Moreover, the Western European trajectories from implicit to explicit CSR are not synchronized with one another, as a U.K. and German comparison of trajectories reveals (Silberhorn & Warren, 2007). While Europe has witnessed a move to greater explicit CSR, this has reflected not only the corporate volitions and strategies that we associate with explicit CSR in the United States but also those we associate with key roles played by the private and public regulators that we have identified with implicit CSR (Matten & Moon, 2008: 416–417). Thus, European explicit CSR policies and practices emerged with the involvement of governments (Albareda, Lozano, Tencati, Midttun, & Perrini, 2008; Knudsen et al., 2015; Steurer, 2010), industry associations (Kinderman, 2012), nongovernmental organizations (den Hond & de Bakker, 2007), and labor organizations (Preuss, Haunschild, & Matten, 2006). In other words, the societal and regulatory actors that had institutionalized European implicit CSR adapted to change in their business environments and were part of the reinstitutionalization of CSR in more explicit forms.

Numerous evaluative issues have arisen. Some authors have pointed to the advantages that Scandinavian companies have in conforming to new explicit expectations by virtue of their strong implicit CSR legacies (e.g., Gjørlberg, 2009). Thus, implicit CSR provided experience of some of the practices more associated with explicit CSR. Other authors have pointed to the tensions that CSR managers face both in complying with the new explicit CSR (which stresses communication strategies) and in abiding with the old implicit CSR (in which communication was not a feature; Schmeltz, 2014; see also Carson, Hagen, & Sethi, 2015, and Kujala, Rehbein, Toikka, & Enroth, 2013). It has been conjectured that overzealous CSR communication would be seen as immodest in the traditional Scandinavian implicit model (Strand, Freeman, & Hockerts, 2015). This tension can be exacerbated given the roles of government in driving explicit CSR in such countries (Carson et al., 2015; Midttun, Gjørlberg, Kourula, Sweet, & Vallentin, 2015).

A number of studies have focused on the processes by which business organizations, companies, and managers alike are grappling with balancing long-standing implicit assumptions

(e.g., about community obligations) with new CSR systems encouraging explicit CSR. Harris, Kim, Amaeshi, and Suh (2013) illustrated how tensions have emerged for South Korean CSR managers seeking both to conform to long-standing implicit expectations and to new regulatory demands for more explicit CSR conformance, and they noted how the new implicit/explicit balances of CSR differ among South Korean industrial sectors. Reddy and Hamann (2018) focused particularly on the disparate roles of less developed Sub-Saharan states in encouraging both implicit and explicit forms of CSR.

The challenge of analyzing and understanding CSR in these non-European country contexts is that the implicit element is often more strongly embedded in informal institutions, religious traditions, and customs, rather than in formal systems of tripartism, neocorporatism, and law more reminiscent of Europe. Moreover, these contexts bring very different forms of exposure to globalization also reflecting their different business systems (see Witt & Redding, 2013), as well as commercial considerations reflecting their place in global value chains. More generally, research in this area stresses the roles of implicit institutional factors in shaping the way explicit CSR is adopted (Jamali & Karam, 2018; Jamali, Osuji, & Onyeka, *in press*).

We now turn to examining two processes integral to the hybridization of implicit CSR and explicit CSR: explicitization and implicitization.

Explicitization

In the context of the general rise of explicit CSR in countries that were more strongly associated with an implicit CSR approach, we find that corporations not only adopt more explicit CSR through innovation but also redefine traditional implicit CSR expectations in explicit CSR terms and, thus, develop more explicit policies, strategies, and practices. If one sifts through non-financial reports or analyzes the explicit CSR practices of corporations in many West European countries, one will find numerous social performance indicators related to environmental protection, health care contributions, or workers' protection and participation, for example, which are long-standing practices of implicit CSR of corporations in those countries. Many of those are MNCs with a strong export business and have made explicit CSR a standard mimetic practice in

anticipation of evaluation by societies and regulators in host country markets (Gjølberg, 2009).

Indian corporations make explicit CSR policies, strategies, and practices (including communication) about what they have traditionally done as part of the implicit expectations of their institutional environment. For example, many had long provided welfare services to local populations motivated by traditional, nationalistic, and often religiously motivated informal institutions. Having become more exposed to global organizational fields, these companies are reframing such implicit practices in terms of explicit CSR. The Tata organization, which for one and a half centuries practiced implicit CSR (Elankumaran, Seal, & Hashmi, 2005), now operates a sophisticated system of what it calls sustainability management as a form of explicit CSR (Ararat, Colpan, & Matten, 2018; Tata & Matten, 2016).

This pattern is also evident in developing economies. In Africa, while informal institutions such as Ubuntu and other entrenched forms of stakeholder engagement (Rossouw, 2005) have been long-standing, there is "translation" of these systems and practices into various forms of explicit CSR. Jamali and Karam have revealed the significance for contemporary explicit CSR in developing countries of implicit institutions (e.g., "values, customs, attitudes . . . influence of ideology and related institutions . . . patriarchal forms of business management" [2018: 37]), which are reflected in organizational practices (e.g., "duty . . . seeking political legitimacy . . . meeting localized expectations of power-holders . . . meeting local populations' expectations" [2018: 39]) and in individual attitudes (e.g., "values . . . religious orientations . . . attitudes to cultural patterns" [2018: 40]).

Similar dynamics can be observed even in areas that had been assumed to be core implicit responsibilities, such as corporate taxation (Moon & Vallentin, 2019). Some Western corporations (e.g., Ørsted & Mærsk in Denmark, Starbucks in the United Kingdom, Google and Facebook in the United States) have adopted explicit CSR policies for responsible corporate taxation (after having been silent on the matter for decades). Some have elected to take a collective explicit approach to responsible corporate taxation. The B Team (an association of business and civil society leaders), which aspires to move "beyond CSR as a vehicle for profit to doing business for social and

planetary wellbeing," launched its responsible tax principles (B Team, 2018) regarding tax management, relationships, and reporting. This includes reference to board oversight, compliance with national law where business is done, and reflecting business structures created only for commercial reasons—all of which were implicit expectations in the respective NBSs (see also <https://www.csreurope.org/governance-and-accountability/tax-project-tax-transparency-responsible-tax-behaviour>).

Thus, explicitization consists largely of the inclusion and transformation of habitual practices that had been unheralded by the respective corporations within CSR and wider corporate policy and strategy (reflecting their erstwhile implicit status). To be clear, we are not arguing that all contemporary explicit CSR emanates from explicitization. That would be to ignore the myriad forms of innovation and new CSR spheres and practices that are clearly also emerging. Our point is simply that in the midst of the tide of explicit CSR adoption and development, there is a powerful current of explicitization of what was once only implicit.

We suggest that these developments can be traced back to our three legitimacy relationships and their interactions and configurations. First, there is a much more active *societal issue* focus on CSR, reflected in normative pressure on corporations (Table 1). This is brought by civil society activists, social media, and public opinion polls that focus on business responsibility and irresponsibility. Societies and their representatives often ask for "proof" of CSR, and, thus, explicit commitments and accounts of behavior are an obvious means for corporations to respond to this pressure. This suggests that much of CSR internationally (Table 1) does not simply reflect adoption of U.S. CSR agendas, or those of inward-investing MNCs. It also represents a renewed pursuit of long-standing societal norms now reflected in the adoption of explicit CSR policies, strategies, and practices.

Second, as governments now provide regulation for reporting (see below), they create further isomorphic pressures for corporations to comply with and, in so doing, reinforce the pressures for explicitization through their CSR reports. Likewise, the changing governance and organizational status and modes of CSR (Table 1) bring new regulators, which also contribute isomorphic pressure for more explicit CSR. Many of the new "mesolevel" institutions between societies and

markets, such as the MSIs and the new business associations and standards organizations, also require demonstrations of CSR on the part of their members or those they seek to regulate. They require evidence that corporations do more than simply sign up to principles and that the corporations evidence how they reflect and enact these principles in the form of policies, strategies, and practices. Likewise, there are new IGO sources of isomorphic, mimetic, and normative pressures that encourage explicitization in the way corporations enact their CSR (e.g., the UN Global Compact Ten Principles).

Third, reflecting their own respective interest in CSR's changing issue focus, business status, modes, and rationales, core corporate *stakeholders* also bring pressure for explicitization of long-standing implicit norms and regulations. This is in the form of demands for reassurance about such activities as responsible investment, responsible sourcing, and responsible employment practices, for which CSR regulators, old and new, now provide ready definitions and measures.

But hybridization does not only consist of the explicitization of the implicit. There is also implicitization of the explicit, which we turn to now. Table 3 summarizes the concepts of explicitization and implicitization.

Implicitization

As indicated in Table 3, implicitization refers to processes by which formal and informal institutions integrate into their norms and rules expectations and obligations for corporations derived from explicit CSR policies, strategies, and

practices. This is especially evident in the roles of national government and the "new CSR regulators" involving civil society and IGOs. There are also signs that this may also be taking place in wider societal norms. Although it is probably too early to conclude that these formerly explicit CSR practices are now firmly "business as usual," what we detail below is, at least, suggestive that voluntary strategies are becoming more a matter of regular compliance. And this has historic resonance, given ways in which early-twentieth-century Europe and North America labor, welfare, and environmental norms and rules often reflected the examples of nineteenth-century CSR pioneers (Husted, 2015).

Implicitization is most evident in the wave of new national governmental regulation for CSR. All European governments have developed regulation for CSR across the range of policy areas, from social and environmental to economic and international, and with a variety of regulatory tools, from endorsement to mandate (Gond, Kang, & Moon, 2011; Knudsen et al., 2015). In many of these cases the governments have simply complemented corporate trends with their own policy frameworks. Nonfinancial reporting—hitherto a quintessential explicit CSR activity quite removed from societal norms and regulatory frameworks—is now a regulatory requirement of most European and North American, and many Asian, governments, either through general regulation or through stock exchange governance requirements (KPMG, 2017). The Danish approach reflects a gradual strengthening of CSR reporting regulation. Initially, soft regulation targeted only a very narrow class of corporations, enabling them to use very wide discretion—even to avoid

TABLE 3
Explicitization and Implicitization of CSR Compared

Explicitization of CSR	Implicitization of CSR
Describes explicit adoption by corporations of responsibility for society's interests and concerns that had been regulated by wider formal and informal institutions	Describes adoption by wider formal and informal institutions of CSR policies that had been deployed explicitly by corporations
Consists of voluntary corporate policies, strategies, and practices whose underlying norms corporations had previously conformed with implicitly	Consists of new/reinvigorated values, norms, and rules for corporations that are informed by policies, strategies, and practices of explicit CSR
Incentives and opportunities are motivated by the perceived expectations of stakeholders, society, and regulators	Requirements for compliance are motivated by integration of expectations of CSR into a new consensus of legitimate expectations of all major groups in society, including corporations

reporting if they explained that they had no CSR. This has been followed by increased compliance requirements (e.g., the increased specification of issues corporations must report on) and a spread of the types of companies the regulations apply to (Knudsen & Moon, 2017; Vallentin, 2015).

Other areas of adaptation of explicit CSR practices into regulatory norms include the new U.S. legal charter for the Benefit Corporation (B Corp), which provides implicit regulatory underpinning for companies to specify their social and financial objectives to their core stakeholders, the public at large, and regulators (Strine, 2014). This combines an implicit form for CSR with explicit content. Other examples of regulation for what had been explicit CSR issues include U.K., French, and Dutch requirements for due diligence in international supply chains to avert child labor and slavery; the adoption by the Norwegian government of voluntary ethical trading codes for public purchasing; the Indian government's CSR tax (Mitra & Chatterjee, 2019); the Chinese government's numerous CSR regulations, particularly on the export sector (Hofman & Moon with Wu, 2017); and, somewhat more indirectly, the use of legality verification to effectively make voluntary agreements binding (e.g., in forestry governance; Cashore & Stone, 2012).

There is also evidence that some industry bodies, sector associations, and professional organizations are seeking to build formerly explicit CSR practices into the normal business behavior of their members. In some countries this trend is accelerated by trade unions and works councils that have become rather active in translating and importing explicit CSR practices into the existing frameworks of workers' participation (Preuss et al., 2006). One of the main implications of this development is that explicit CSR has, paradoxically, become more governed by rules, whether private, public, or hybrid and whether in the form of agreements, codes, or soft law regulations. Parts of many industries now are governed by such "voluntary" rules as in commodities, be it agriculture or mining, apparel, ICT, and finance, whereby formerly explicit CSR policies take the form of implicit CSR for the sector, governed by those newly created partnerships, associations, and MSIs.

It is also worth noting evidence that evaluation of corporations' CSR is becoming a more common societal practice. CSR now features in many opinion polls, particularly since the Millennium

Poll on Corporate Social Responsibility (Environics International, 1999). Moreover, new social movements, often through the new media, have succeeded in popularizing key CSR issues by mobilizing public responses to the 2008 financial crisis, the release of the Panama Papers, and, more generally, the impacts of corporations on climate change. Concepts such as fair trade, organic farming, and sustainable timber and fish—once the exclusive lexicon of the cognoscenti—have become popularized on the high streets through labeling on products of major brands.

Overall, implicitization could be regarded as a process of "normalization" of CSR agendas and practices in different business systems. Clearly, its effects remain partial, since many of those attempts to institutionalize CSR in underlying norms and rules are still largely linked to institutions and agreements that only have a limited regional, sectoral, functional, value chain, or market reach. What is surely true is that regulators, private and public, are incorporating formerly explicit CSR agendas to define more generalized expectations of business.

DISCUSSION

Contributions

The focus of this article is on the meaning and dynamics of CSR. It contributes by deepening and extending our earlier analysis of implicit and explicit CSR (Matten & Moon, 2008). Of course, CSR meaning and dynamics are mutually entailed as in any essentially contested concept. This is because any *change* might be considered, by some, to be consistent with the prior agreed meaning of the concept, while for others that same phenomenon might be considered not as change but as *difference*, because they would consider that some aspect of that change was inconsistent with the prior agreed meaning (Gallie, 1955–1956). Thus, our first contribution has been to justify our earlier article's capacious definition of CSR because it is not overly constrained by any particular temporal or spatial context, and it is relatively independent of particular issue agendas, modes of responsibility, or rationalizations.

Second, this article has deepened the 2008 article's conceptualization of CSR context by moving from the specifics of NBSs and focusing on three key legitimacy relationships for CSR,

between corporations and core stakeholders, societies at large, and regulators. We propose these three types of relationship as "legitimacy variables" that will feature one way or another in any business system context and will inform configurations of implicit and explicit CSR.

Third, whereas in our earlier article we drew on notions of legitimacy derived from theories of NBSs and neoinstitutionalism, in this essay we have drawn on the organizational legitimacy literature to strengthen the conceptualization of these corporate relationships and of the legitimacy they derive from CSR. Taken together, these contributions enable a model for CSR that differentiates expectations about business responsibility in their context and that links these with the forms of implicit or explicit CSR that corporations reflect or generate, and with the respective forms of legitimacy these CSR configurations yield and their associated rewards (Figure 1).

This article also extends our 2008 article's analysis of CSR dynamics by building on insights from other researchers concerning the hybridization of explicit and implicit CSR to conceptualize explicitization and implicitization of CSR. CSR explicitization is the adoption for explicit CSR purposes of underlying societal norms and regulators' policies that had hitherto governed the wider institutions in which corporations participate (i.e., implicit CSR). CSR implicitization reflects the adoption of policies, strategies, and practices associated with explicit CSR into wider informal and formal institutions by which corporations—and other actors—are regulated.

When introducing these concepts, we did not venture into normative judgments. One can imagine different views as to whether explicitization and implicitization are to be welcomed, in part reflecting their context. With respect to explicitization, it might be considered welcome—and even overdue—that corporations take societal and regulatory expectations to heart. Conversely, one might also object that if the emphasis here is purely on corporate rhetoric (which, to be clear, we do not assume), then this would merely smack of window dressing (Friedman, 1970) or greenwash (Bowen & Aragon-Correa, 2014). From another perspective, one might fear that excessive mimicking of implicit norms for explicitization might stifle CSR innovation. Our argument is not that all explicit CSR is the result of explicitization of the formerly implicit. We recognize that current explicit CSR—particularly in relation to

sustainability agendas—reflects corporations' volition for innovation quite apart from their adoption of the currency of implicit CSR, which we distinguish as explicitization.

The trend toward the implicitization of CSR may bring concerns that some corporations will seek to avoid its effects. For example, the U.S. Sarbanes-Oxley Act (2002) and Dodd-Frank Act (2010) have both been associated with de-listings from the U.S. stock exchanges and with the growth in private equity and hedge fund activity motivated by a desire to avoid the respective regulations. More broadly, there is a fear that the tightening of regulations targeting bribery, foreign corruption, tax evasion, unfair or abusive labor practices, and other socially irresponsible business practices has led some corporations to contract out activities that might otherwise make them susceptible to the wrath of the law and, thus, enabling them to maintain their legitimacy through CSR. It has also been suggested that some Indian companies are reluctant to consider their responsibilities for human rights in their supply chains because they have met their CSR obligations through payment of the Indian CSR tax (Agarwal, 2018; Srinivasan & Parvathy, in press).

Limitations and Further Research

We can identify several limitations to our analysis. First, we describe our opening depiction of CSR then and now (Table 1) as a stylized interpretation for the purpose of introducing CSR and the significance of its dynamics. Because our 2008 and present analyses are institutional and stress the significance of context, we are the first to note that Table 1 is hardly an exhaustive or comprehensive account of CSR!

Second, concerning our definition of CSR, we have already noted that this brings some methodological and evaluative challenges. It might be observed that by deploying an overly capacious CSR definition, we are in the end "comparing apples with tables," or that "if CSR is everything maybe it is nothing" (to borrow from Wildavsky, 1973: 127). To reiterate, we advocate analysis that differentiates forms of CSR, obviously between its implicit and explicit forms but also between its "issues, modes and rationales" (Moon et al., 2017: 32), for example. Concerning the question about how we can be sure that corporate policies, strategies, and policies meet our CSR definition "for some wider societal good" (Matten & Moon,

2008: 405), we note that while our framework does not include further normative criteria, it assumes that CSR claims of companies will be evaluated by core stakeholders, societies, and regulators in the process of legitimization or otherwise.

Third, while evidence of explicitization of CSR is available, it is more difficult to be conclusive about implicitization. The fact that societal and regulatory actors are advancing norms and regulations to govern CSR does not automatically mean that implicitization has taken place. This is merely a first step, and the answer to the question of whether these initiatives have led to some normalization of the new CSR expectations will need to echo Zhou Enlai's (famously misattributed) verdict on the significance of the French Revolution: "It is too soon to say."

Other limitations to our article bring opportunities for further research. The relationships of the processes of explicitization and implicitization (what we call institutional direction in Table 1) to the other CSR characteristics that we use to compare CSR then and now offer an avenue for closer investigation. Research can examine if and how each process is associated with CSR's characteristics: context, issue focus, business status, governance status, organizational status, modes, and rationale.

There is plenty of scope for further research to probe and elaborate on our underlying theory with reference to three types of legitimacy relationships. Questions here might include the balance and nature of relationships among these in informing explicit and implicit forms of CSR, particularly through explicitization and implicitization, and their implications for CSR policies, strategies, and practices in different contexts.

We suggest that there are particularly rich opportunities for exploring the processes of explicitization and implicitization in "developing" or "emerging" business systems. In the 2008 article framework, the concept of implicit CSR was mainly based on formal Western institutions. But in many parts of the world, large sections of the economy are regulated by nonformal institutions, with or without formal ones (Kim & Moon, 2015). These circumstances are sometimes described as "institutional voids," but often it is simply that the institutions are different from those in Western business systems (Jamali & Karam, 2018; Jamali et al., in press). The more important questions concern the nature, explanation, and evaluation of the explicit and implicit forms of CSR in

such contexts, and of their dynamics, including through explicitization and implicitization.

Another limitation to our analysis is that we do not attend to "the politics" of explicitization and implicitization. Historically, key CSR watersheds have been explained by issues of power and interest, whether of corporations trying to avert regulation (Kaplan, 2014), of governments trying to engage CSR to secure their own agendas (Kinderman, 2012; Moon, 2005), or of political parties bringing distinctive policy approaches to CSR within the same country (Vallentin, 2015). In international politics we have seen the rise of corporate power in governance of CSR and sustainability (Ponte, 2019). Moreover, we have two major political watersheds in prospect that might reframe CSR as currently understood. First, there is a revival of nationalism on all continents, bringing the potential for tempering or even reversing globalization toward a more patchwork world in which national and subnational contexts resume their erstwhile significance for CSR (Witt, 2019). Second, the external dynamics for CSR in Africa are becoming less a matter of colonial legacies and Western-initiated investment and supply chains and more a reflection of BRIC investments reflecting close governmental involvement, particularly from China (Taylor, 2014). Hence, research could address questions concerning how and why political power is reflected in emerging forms of explicitization and implicitization.

Likewise, this essay does not engage with organizational-level questions, also critical in periods of CSR adaptation. Thus, research could investigate how corporations resolve organizational challenges of their CSR explicitization strategy (Vigneau, Humphreys, & Moon, 2015) or how they integrate their explicitization approaches across their international subsidiaries (Gutierrez Huerter O, Moon, Gold, & Chapple, in press). Such questions about how corporations organize for explicitization can be particularly interesting in view of the trend of increasing partial organization of CSR reflecting the roles of civil society and even regulatory actors in corporate policies, strategies, and practices (Rasche et al., 2013).

We have two final reflections. First, revisiting an article confirms that we are all too human, and there were things we would rather have done differently. Second, events are a great test of ideas, and in the period that we were devising our

implicit-explicit CSR framework, we did not envisage the developments captured in our then and now and hybridization analyses. This raises the question about the meaning and dynamics of CSR in 2028 . . . so we look forward to another decade of debate about and analysis of CSR.

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Dirk Matten (DMatten@schulich.yorku.ca) holds the Hewlett-Packard Chair in CSR, Schulich School of Business, York University, and is a visiting professor at Copenhagen Business School and the Universities of London, Nottingham, and Sabanci. He received his Ph.D. in international business (Dr. habil.) from Heinrich-Heine-University Düsseldorf. He is interested in business ethics, governance of digital technologies, and comparative management.

Jeremy Moon (jm.msc@cbs.dk) is professor of sustainability governance, Copenhagen Business School, and director of the CBS Sustainability Centre. He received his Ph.D. in politics from the University of Exeter. His research interests include CSR theory, comparative CSR, and business and governance.

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