

Corporate Responsibility and the Collegial Field

By JAN TULLBERG*

ABSTRACT. This article is based on 21 interviews of informants actively engaged with corporate responsibility in Sweden. The article introduces a new concept—the “collegial field”—which is helpful in understanding the course of events. With systems that are more open to other organizations, horizontal groupings with common interests become more influential. Collegial fields can also be relevant for understanding other activities in organizations than corporate responsibility.

Introduction

Increasing companies' responsibility can be seen as an effect of changes in more general moral rules in society. Responsibility can be seen as a consequence of a normative analysis and it can be seen as a social process. From the last perspective, an interesting question concerns what impact does this process have on the organization. What is it that drives the company's interest for a widened company responsibility in programs and initiatives? Is it an authentic consumer demand, or are there other demand groups, like investors or employees, that make an impact? Or is it highly influenced by supply? There are actors inside and outside the company with an interest to deliver services such as goal-setting, implementation, and reporting.

This article builds upon a field study that examines a Swedish state organization called Global Responsibility (*Globalt Ansvar*) whose task is to disseminate a set of international norms, Global Compact's 10 principles, to companies and authorities. The Global Compact Initiative is a U.N. organization launched by the secretary general Kofi Annan in 2000 and the principles summarize the main part of the concept *corporate responsibility* (CR) by addressing issues regarding

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American Journal of Economics and Sociology, Vol. 73, No. 1 (January, 2014).

DOI: 10.1111/ajes.12061

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social conditions, the environment, human rights, and corruption. The mission of Global Responsibility also includes promoting the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, which is a set of similar CR norms.

The main report, in Swedish, presented an analysis of the interviews, but also contained a more theoretical reflection on collaboration that crossed organizational boundaries. In this article, the focus has changed so that a more general model stands in the center and the empirical data play a secondary role. Inductive reasoning from the data has, however, been an important source of the model that will be presented. Therefore, the next section will make a short description of the study. I will then present the hypothesis of this article: “The collegial field” is crucial for the demand of CR activity. After that follows a presentation of theoretical ideas providing a wider context. Then, I will provide some empirical observations relevant for the judgment whether CR constitutes such a collegial field. The article terminates with sections of discussion and conclusions.

The Global Responsibility Study

I conducted 21 interviews with persons in Global Responsibility and collaborating organizations in Sweden. The interviews were semi-structured and normally between one and two hours and taped. The informants had possibility to make personal comments off the record in addition to representing the position of their organization. Central parts of the interviews were typed within the next day. The central theme was the collaboration and influence of different CR actors especially Global Responsibility. The Swedish report has been distributed to the informants who were offered possibilities to correct any perceived misunderstanding or misrepresentation.

My informants can be categorized in four different groups: 1/ persons working, now or previously, for Global Responsibility itself, 2/ NGOs: Amnesty Business Group, CSR Sweden, and Swedwatch, 3/ large commercial companies: ABB (industry equipment), Ica (retail food), HM (retail clothes), and Åhléns (department stores), and 4/ public organizations: Council of Export, Ministry of Industry, Export Credit Institute, and Swedish Industry (organization of employers).

The theme of the interviews was the interaction between CR professionals in different organizations, so there is no surprise that I received the information that such interaction is taking place, but what is of interest is the character and quality of these relationships.

When discussing differences between organizations many informants ranked noncommercial organizations as more or less “company-friendly,” but this was a matter of degree. Such differences were less seen as a cause of conflict between the NGOs themselves than as a kind of constructive differentiation. Some organizations were bringing issues on the table and others were more oriented at agreement at the table. Some criticism was directed towards persons and policies of other organizations, but there was still a similar attitude. The strategy was to find a position hard enough not to “be wimpy,” but soft enough to be “relevant.” There was an ambition to carry both a carrot and a stick, but media attention was on criticism, and NGO check-up studies stressing progress do not generate headlines. The public perception of NGOs might be seeing them as more anti-business than they are.

A problem for companies was the negative character of many topics. Reduced omissions are still omissions and reductions missing targets are more newsworthy than overachievements. The benefit of CR activity was not only that it reduced the number of scandals but that it improved capability to correct mistakes and made the company “look less dumb.” Positive claims often backfired, so the companies focused ambitions and effort rather than results. The companies also communicated with NGOs that were considered unfriendly. Company relations with NGOs were considered better than in other countries and the perception was that the gap has closed over time and that the NGOs have become much less hostile.

There was little rivalry between different governmental bodies. They rather asked for advice and complementary information than seeing another body as unneeded duplication. Global Responsibility launched itself with a large number of seminars that were generally seen as complementary. The organization of employers initially saw Global Responsibility as a party political initiative, but revised that opinion to a positive attitude. The center-right government has been as supportive to Global Responsibility as the previous center-left. The

organization started up with partnership intentions so it had a rivalry situation with Global Compact Nordic, an organization for companies that have signed the Global Compact. But competition is not fiercer than that: Global Responsibility provided hosting services when the other organization had a meeting in Stockholm. Several companies are involved with both organizations.

Most informants considered forcing legislation as a factual alternative, but that it was not an issue on their own agenda. The latter is all about convincing companies to, step by step, take actions in what can be summarized as the responsible direction. Legislation was not a weapon displayed or asked for. One NGO informant saw an individual and organization maturity process; the young are primarily interested in taking a position, but later it becomes more important to be a part of the process and make a difference; dialogue offers more influence than critique. Both NGOs and companies pointed out that there was no push for boycott or terminating activity in developing countries, but for reforming production; there was no hidden protectionist agenda. A difference from the USA is that there is no pressure on companies for charity and the argumentation for CR is built on the premise that the benefit for the trademark should exceed the costs for the company. On a specific level there can be strong differences in opinion, but at large there are many common interests. This is even more so when looking at personal interests instead of organizational.

Demand and the Collegial Field

It is important to make a distinction between different types of demand. Many things are desirable if they are free, but a willingness to pay is often central for satisfying the desire. Consumers should find a product or service not only desirable, but worth buying. If there is also an ability to pay, the preferences and needs have become a concrete demand. The consumer regards goods as worth buying in relation to other possible alternatives and a demand is usually characterized as a desire and a willingness to pay.

The term “expectation” has a different implication: that something is already embedded in what one has paid for, and that if the

company does not deliver everything in the purchased package, it can be perceived as a disappointment. There is no need that this should be something one considers especially desirable in itself, but for other companies or persons to fulfil their undertakings is regarded as important, and even a marginal shortcoming is often perceived as both irritating and unethical. To a high degree, the advocates of CR avoid the “worth buying” step and proceed to what is expected. Expectation is a step away from genuine consumer preferences and toward the consumer’s perception of what is customary. However, the consumer’s picture is often not very precise, and an investigation among experts can be seen as more revealing of what is really customary and what an informed person should reasonably expect. It is a short step from there to what one can judge that a consumer *should* expect.

If economics has traditionally been dominated by “demand,” politics has centered upon “expectations.” The desires of citizens have been largely specified as expectations of a new government. Apathy and pessimism about the politicians’ abilities and intentions are a threat, but too high expectations are a further threat. Adlai Stevenson and Tage Erlander have spoken of “the dissatisfaction of rising expectations.” Politicians have not been adept enough to prevent this situation and have frequently fueled rising expectations.

Another way of approaching demand is to see it less as a manifestation of consumer preferences, and more as influence from different groups. Demand may come from one’s own organization, from collaborating organizations, or from media. The other types of demand need not be based on a demand from end-consumers’ view that the product is worth buying, but can be highly disengaged. My informants spontaneously divided up demand into different components and expressed their perceptions of the strength of attraction to CR. The informant at HM reported that 16–20 percent of the consumers say they sometimes make an active de-selection. Some persons state that they come to HM in order to buy ecological cotton, but both interest and knowledge are limited. Due to alarming newspaper articles, “everyone knows” that child labor occurs, but they buy anyway. The informant’s judgment was that the CR issue is much more important during recruitment and for the already employed. Other informants,

however, thought that the employees in general are relatively uninterested in CR. A small group of consumers have a preference and a willingness to pay, but most consumers demand a standard product without extra costs. A previous chief at Global Responsibility believed that the interest in CR is low among consumers, important for the employees, and even more important for the owners. There is an interest in firm guidelines: “What is the rule that matters?” The informant wanted something like a WTO agreement so as to obtain clear playing rules for CR.

The Collegial Field

If the genuine consumer demand is weak, the issue arises as to what forces create the CR expectation, which many believe to be ever stronger, and that the companies are urged to adapt themselves to. A response here is that the CR activity has a strong support from what I call the “collegial field.” I will associate this newly coined concept, but also distinguish it from “organizational fields” (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). A basic thought behind the idea of organizational fields is that an organization is largely characterized by contiguous organizations. Not least, there is strong influence by the behavior of competitors. An organization can learn from suppliers and customers, but primarily from how the competitors treat their suppliers and customers (Aspers 2008; White 1981). Oscar Wilde observed that imitation is the only honest form of flattery, but his judgment has not been sufficient to give imitation the place in the sun that it deserves. Organizational fields are mainly industrial fields where strong centripetal forces exist. Both customers and suppliers have expectations that influence the companies in an industry toward convergence. The organizations approach each other, and a shared industry is an important common denominator.

A collegial field can be seen as a horizontal matrix level that cuts across widely different organizations with separate hierarchies. It consists not of a coherent profession, but of people with different occupations and educations. However, it is not just a community of opinion—it involves interests of sustenance and career. Others in the stratum are to be seen largely as principals of one’s assignment. They

clarify what is expected, desired, or required. In the communicative process, they provide to a high degree the feedback on what is produced in the individual organization. Organizational fields are often regarded as convergences between whole organizations, whereas by collegial fields is meant a more partial community that concerns only portions of the respective organization. For a long time, a situation prevails where decisions must be taken with deficient information. A crucial issue then becomes a broad expert assessment that can be considered a horizontal stratum. On the same level in a number of different organizations are those who, in consultant jargon, "own and drive the issue." This is what I call a collegial field. For organizations, there are several distinct collegial fields. A market field with marketing departments, advertising agencies, media consultants, researchers, newspapers, and printers can be viewed as such an organization-crossing field where the purchaser of advertising also gets part of the recognition when the advertising agency wins a prize for its creation.

It is important to distance this analysis from a constructivist outlook with irrational behavior that arises and reproduces itself in an arbitrary fashion. In contrast, this outlook emphasizes rationality, but implies that hierarchical rationality does not always permeate an organization. The large bonuses of bank directors for risk-taking is an example of self-interest that has been pursued despite its plausibly conflicting with long-term ownership interests. The directors have asserted that harmony exists between these interests, but have maintained a special interest in reality. Sometimes the actors manage to influence the rules, as in the case of bonuses, but usually they have to act within the rules as best they can. James Buchanan (1975) stresses the distinction between playing by the game rules and the rationality in the game rules. Tullberg (2006) analyzes rationality and irrationality at the individual and system levels. The degree of rationality in the system and rules can be discussed, but the individual's choice is often to act rationally within the system's given limits. The collegial field can be seen as a subsystem with its own rational logic and dynamics. Before looking further into the connection between my empirical findings and the concept of collegial field, I want to make a theoretical connection that I find fruitful.

Generalized Darwinism and Evolutionary Economics

Campbell (1965) and many others have proposed Darwin's three mechanisms—replication, variation, and selection—as a more general system to be used also in other than biological contexts. Richard Dawkins (1976) has developed a meme theory. The meme is the gene's cultural counterpart, which is modified, copied, and spread. Without a high degree of precision in copying, change becomes less distinct, whereas an ability to replicate with relatively small modifications allows a selection that acquires great significance. The meme frequency in society can be altered radically, and this happens much faster than the impact of natural selection on gene frequencies. Even a weak selective force that promotes certain genes somewhat more often than others will have a great impact after a long time; just a percent or so higher chance of survival influences natural selection. Another factor worth noting about natural selection is that mutations and copying occur at the gene level, while the selection occurs mainly at the level of organisms.

The human organism carries both memes and genes, and is assigned a subordinate role by Dawkins—only as a “vehicle,” since these passengers are in strong control. An adept, Susan Blackmore (1999), has stressed this feature even more. The result has been something of an inverted perspective: an egg that, through the hen, creates new eggs. Memes, according to Blackmore, can to a high degree create receptivity to certain other memes through special memplexes. She thinks that ideas of a self and of free will are largely epiphenomena created by a selfplex that is attracted to a flattering self-image. This perspective offers much of interest to those who like theories of weak actors that behave, rather than act in a more independent sense. There are, for instance, similarities to the conclusions, though not the reasoning, of an organization researcher such as John Meyer (1986).

Many critics, defenders, and improvers have contributed to meme theory. Dawkins's article with the title “Universal Darwinism” (1983) has aroused interest in economic circles, manifested, for instance, in a special issue of the *Journal of Evolutionary Economics* (Witt 2006). Perhaps the most fruitful development is an extensive scientific

paradigm regarding co-evolution of biology and culture (Boyd and Richerson 1985; Bowles, Choi, and Hopfensitz 2003). This is, however, not the line of exploration here since it is a too large and complex issue to be included. The mission is limited to reintroduce the basic evolutionary concepts and how they are brought into analysis of organizations by evolutionary economics. In my opinion this theoretical angle has been underused in organization theory.

Probably the most influential work on evolutionary economics is that of Nelson and Winter (1982). In their model, rules are seen as corresponding to genes, and the organization to an organism that undergoes selection. Profit is the factor with strongest effect on the organization's survival and reproduction. High profit enables not only organic growth for the company, but also purchase of other companies and transfer of one's routines to them. Moreover, other independent companies will imitate a successful one, which further raises the frequency of certain rules and routines. A central weakness of many meme theories in areas apart from economics is that the selective force is often vaguely specified, which is troublesome, since selection is the chief innovation in Darwin's theory. In biology, the selection criterion is "fitness," relative reproductive success. This is not circular, mixing cause and effect, but such criticism is common and is not obviously wrong. Profit as the selection criterion is clearer in several respects than its counterpart in the original theory.

Variation as "Preselection"

In the world of companies, numerous products, organizational changes, recruitments, and campaigns are introduced, which, it turns out later, do not pass the market's selection verdict. People have difficulty in intellectually evaluating different ideas, so most go through a process of trial and error. But those that are tested on the market have passed a kind of "preselection" by winning the trust of decisionmakers. The latter do not only make decisions based on clear evidence, proven experience, or even vague tacit knowledge. Genetic mutations are random and lack intentions, but companies' variations of routines are directed to both goals and content. In the area of organization and company management, diverse schools have arisen that present a new

way of structuring and leading operations such as business process engineering (Hammer and Champy 1993), just in time (Hutchins 1999), and lean production (Pascal 2002). It is important to find out whether ideas like these are selected by the market in the meaning that they achieve substantial results as higher income and lower costs, or if they are just a popular variation that has gone through the preselection of managers. CR policies are still cultural variation in line with genetic mutations, but not yet tested by the market and the bottom line. That test is what corresponds to natural selection.

It takes a very long time before new ideas are tested in reality and experience is acquired about whether expected profits of efficiency compensate for the costs. Hence, prior to evaluation of new initiatives through market selection and bottom-line results, preselection is carried out by the management or other decisionmakers in the company. A criterion for this decision is whether other successful companies invest in the novelty or not. Lacking real evidence-based results, these ideas are maintained to be verdict-based: a large number of companies have shown through decisions that they have confidence in these models. The value of such support is reduced, however, if the assessments are not independent but only reflections of a conformist trend (Surowiecki 2004). If one cannot get a reliable assessment by the end-consumer, one can also look at different stakeholders outside the company who may be thought to give guidance about consumer opinion. Not least the media are important here, as they presumably do not just mirror the public's view but help to create it. Several factors indicate that what takes place is conformism transmission. The change is not so much the uniquely new as a popular conformist novelty that influences the variation.

This distinction between selection by the market and decisions in the company is made by several influential scientists in organization theory such as Hannan and Freeman (1977). They use the dichotomy selection and adaptation, but in an evolutionary context these terms cause confusion. Selection works by promoting improved probabilities for survival and reproduction. Often, a distinction is made between adaptive and maladaptive changes to avoid the connotation that decisions/changes are adaptive. Therefore, I prefer the term preselection for the decisions in the company. Variation in nature and

business does not imply only improvement, but a much larger amount of impaired alternatives. Economics have a tendency to see the market reaction as a fast and correct judgment, and that everything in existence in a market economy has been selected. A contribution of generalized Darwinism is that it opens up a window of maladaptation. There are reasons to perceive a large amount of alternatives as variations that never stood the test of selection. In time, all products, like organisms, will be replaced by other products, but there is a difference between temporal successes and variants that were created by intention and expectations but never delivered the expected benefits.

A concept that has gained popularity, but been misused as well, is “tacit knowledge” (Polanyi 1958). The term has often become a label for phenomena that are neither tacit nor knowledgeable. Tacitness does not lie in the recommendation, which is often highly insistent, but in the deficient argumentation—“That’s how we do it in this place.” Sometimes it is a routine that has been distilled from successive experiences, and then it may deserve to be called knowledge even if it does not qualify for terms like “evidence-based.” Frequently, though, the behavior has no value other than conformist advantages, and is rather an advocacy of adapting to the collective line without giving good reasons. Tacit knowledge is by definition not expressed knowledge, but the absence of expressed reasons does not demonstrate the presence of tacit knowledge.

Occasionally, the pressure for certain behavior is much stronger than a general preference for conformity. This problem was recently actualized for every decisionmaker responsible for loans at the various banks that noted an ever more explosive credit bubble, who nevertheless worked under the instruction to increase the market share of the bank’s credit granting. *The Economist* paraphrased Keynes: “If you work in finance, the market can stay irrational longer than you can stay in your job” (Economist 2009: 18). Subsystems may guide strongly toward behavior that is rational for the agent in his or her context, but irrational in a wider perspective.

Two phenomena contribute to making the selective force unclear in human culture. In many social contexts, success is a social reaction, so that conventions of success exist in the eye of the beholder more than

in results, and are self-strengthening. An interesting viewpoint is to see cultural processes as epidemics: if there is susceptibility, the effect is an exponential growth rather than a stepwise selection. *The tipping point* becomes a term for a level where a process becomes a trend with rapid diffusion, instead of only some odd behavior that gains currency in a stepwise manner when it proves to have good results. This is the name of a bestseller by Gladwell (2000) inspired by academics Thomas Schelling and Mark Granovetter. Many human phenomena are especially centered on their reproducibility. Chain letters are an excellent example of strict focus on expansive reproduction. The incentive is closely coupled to the newcomer's own success in recruiting new adepts. Religion is devoted on one level to the saving of souls, but central parts of its doctrine are the diffusion of a message through missions to heathen peoples and, primarily, the transfer of memes to one's own offspring. This process has been very successful. Demands for evidence that the doctrine is true have often been claimed as due to weak personal character.

Performativity

The difference between preselection and selection can sometimes be unclear, especially when they both contain an element of conformity. A common notion and statement is that "a prophecy is self-fulfilling." This usually means that if enough people believe the prophecy, it comes true, but that if it is not well-known, the result in reality would differ from this forecast. When a product is acclaimed in the media as the leading candidate for the next "Christmas Gift of the Year," the probability grows that it will be a best-seller. Less noticed are "self-annihilating prophecies." A prognosis can bring about reactions such as an established historical pattern with possibilities of profit disappears because too many actors begin to pursue its tip about the future.

A variant of self-fulfilling prophecies is the idea that theories possess "performativity" (Austin 1962). Such an effect is commonly illustrated by how a formula of Black and Scholes caused, rather than reflected, the evaluation of options (MacKensy and Millo 2003). The conformist, rather than the theoretical, aspect deserves attention. Perhaps the

central issue is not what the individual decisionmaker believes about the formula's predictive power, but what he thinks that other actors believe. If there is a tendency to sell stocks that are overvalued according to the formula, and buy those that are undervalued, then a performativity exists and is rational to accept. Already Keynes described how one's choice is influenced by perceptions of others' conformism rather than by one's own genuine preferences. Keynes exemplified with beauty contests at English resorts, where profits were distributed by lottery among those who voted for the winning candidate. A voter who hoped for a monetary reward was in a situation similar to an investor in the stock market. The central point is not one's own direct judgment, but an indirect assessment: What judgment is made by others? Certain outcomes are strongly impacted by the prognosis. A prognosis that has turned out to influence many others, or is expected to have good chances of doing so, becomes a strong factor in the judgment. Personal distance from the conventional view does not necessarily have a decisive effect. A personal opinion that the stock market is fundamentally overvalued can impart a confidence that there will always be some incurable optimist, in this hardly sceptical majority, who is willing to buy one's stocks even when the market is folding.

CR activity is now so comprehensive that it is plausible to expect large companies to make plenty of efforts in this area. Those who have such expectations are, to a great extent, persons who work with the issues and are both initiated, interested, and professionally involved. The ideas acquire performativity.

Meme Generation of CR

If rules are pure knowledge, it would be enough to produce information just once to generate a diffusion of knowledge. But the new models for solutions seldom have such a firm basis. Empirical experience is rarely sufficient to confirm a proposal's suitability, and the logical reasoning often has disturbing defects. A more propaganda-like success is then important, and frequency often determines whether a line is adopted. What arouses general agreement and urgency attracts one's own company to agree, and preferably in such

a way that the company appears to be driving, or “proactive,” rather than passively accepting or “reactive.” If the quantitative meme generation is important, the media play a central role.

It becomes something of a battle of the spheres in Pascal’s sense (Walzer 1983). One must attain dominance; gain the position of a recognized goal, reach a tipping point. A few of the godless are excluded, but the struggle is not a movement for the rare true believers. In this phase, “everyone must join” and even rival goals are included if possible. According to a common formulation by consultants: “It is not a question of either/or, but of both/and.” The choice is not between the environment and industrialization—they are fused into sustainable development. I see the intellectual dimension mainly in the battle between different solutions to the same problem, whereas the battle between problems to get attention is largely a matter of marketing.

The conventions of the United Nations normally contain, besides an undertaking by governments to follow them, a commitment to motivate other organizations, which are subordinate to the respective states, to act according to the adopted rules as well. Global Compact has also included a clear missionary intention. The companies joining it undertake both to follow the principles, and to propagate for other companies to follow these: “To become public advocates for the compact and its nine principles [originally 9, later 10] in the corporate statements, annual reports and similar venues” (Annan 2000: 7). Such promises exist in many CR organizations. The area of socially responsible investments (SRI) can serve as an example. Numerous financial companies specify six *Principles for Responsible Investments*. In addition to their own obedience of the rules, they make a commitment to spread the rules to others. “We encourage other investors to adopt the Principles” (SOU 2008: 107, p. 29).

The media is central in distributing CR memes but also attributed a role as judge, not only a channel. To a high degree companies and other organizations look at themselves through the lenses of the media. Press cuttings are often a key component of companies’ web pages: confirmation comes from seeing oneself through others. Can a company have a policy or a leader that is branded as passé? Is the main function not to “reach through the screen,” as we say of a

popular program head on TV? Responsiveness to trends in time is a sign of being sensitive and on the right track.

CR as a Collegial Field

The informants use other concepts than the collegial field to display the affiliation between different actors. One informant spoke of “the discipline” as a community of value and a reference group of persons who worked with CR in various companies. Quite clearly, they were both stimulated and helped by projects in other companies and by consultants. “All those who work with a question want to be best. At the same time one must not run away from one’s company.” The informant from Swedish Industry described the expansion of services in communication and accounting within CR as a “new industry.” Another term used by the informants is “the responsibility industry.”

The informant from CSR Sweden commented on a number of factors that connect the activities in different organizations. One way for NGO groups to make an impact is using certain types of lists. The journal *Miljöaktuellt (Environment News)* had a list of powerful persons within the CR sphere and Amnesty Business Group has conducted a rating. The informant thought that companies are very anxious to be placed highly. This can be taken to support the hypothesis about a common field with a relevant status hierarchy. She also referred to personnel movements from NGOs to the CR positions in large companies such as Åhléns, Sandvik, and Electrolux. Moreover, the informant saw a connection between interest in CR and the company having been criticized earlier. Several informants spontaneously described this as a general pattern. A joint experience is a tie that unites and yields a similar assignment in a number of companies that operate in different industries.

One can relate CR issues to the distinction between rivalry and complementary properties of products. Companies that struggle for contract present highly rival products, yet their agitation often does not involve what is generally good or bad, right or wrong, but only to what degree each company achieves rather similar goals. Regarding these goals, the companies may pursue a common line, and the rivalry may be limited to a number of issues while others are shared or

complementary. Also for different creators of rules, their basic messages are largely common, and then they have to hope that minor distinctions—such as differences in networks—will end up favoring one's own organization. Jutterström (2006) shows that organizations with ambitions of operating as standard setters for other organizations have multiplied very fast since 1994. Different markets' center of gravity varies with regard to the *pull* of demand and the *push* of supply. There has been an extreme growth on the supply side.

CR is greatly concerned with transactions and interactions where intermediaries play a central role. Within the ISO 26.000 process, a division is made between six categories. Some are classical groups such as states, large companies, consumers, and unions—the last two being the most weakly represented groups. Probably the most influential of the six groups goes under the acronym SSRO—“*Service, Support, Research and Others*.” Actors that have traditionally been seen as rather marginal subcontractors have expanded into a much bigger and more central role.

The ABB informant mentioned two examples of CR-oriented demand. Investors were one interested group, and the oil industry was another. The informant described the oil companies as very safety-minded and therefore requiring their suppliers to have policies in this area. ABB writes explicitly in its annual report that the company chooses certified suppliers instead of those lacking such documentation. As links in the value chain, companies are coupled together. This creates a centripetal force that counteracts the centrifugal one of freedom of action, which could lead to very different choices between the organizations. It can be described as a convergence in broad terms with possibilities of accentuating certain issues. The feeling of independence and initiative is preserved at the same time as joint goals create references and legitimacy.

Several informants mentioned the introduction of an instruction for state companies to use GRI rules as a central event in the CR area. When Minister Olofsson presented that decision, at a meeting in 2007 with Global Compact Nordic, it brought standing ovations by the company representatives. Global Responsibility's then chief pointed out that she had never before seen such an enthusiastic reaction from corporations to a politician's presentation. Many of the represented

companies were not directly affected by the decision, but it was still seen as a substantial support by these persons, who conducted similar projects in their companies. It was a victory for the collegial field as a whole, even though the government instruction directly concerned only the representatives of state companies and their communicators and accountants.

The CR field has advanced its positions during only a few years. An explanation for this is the avoidance of a debate complicating the issue; there is wide agreement on a few messages that have become ever more frequent. A broad approach without distinctions and priorities has dominated, and conceptual vagueness plays a subordinate role since everyone is generally positive. If some were to prioritize sustainability in a more precise sense and oppose it to certain social projects, there would be wishes for the term not to include social questions, and for CSR to contain the social questions but not the environmental questions. But for the time being, all concepts are used as synonyms—which hinders analysis, yet also a sceptical debate. Lack of clarity can be useful as long as there is general support. Different companies' priorities are not set in opposition but become more complementary alternatives.

Another nearly unanimous message has been the claim of profitability. CR activity is not a concession that the companies make to atone for un-Christian machinations, or a political sacrifice to a leftist political enemy. One of the few issues where people in various organizations were critical of others in the field was that “they think CR has something to do with charity.” The actions carried out were motivated, not by goodness, but in order to strengthen the trademark. A Christian outlook would motivate soft-spoken giving of alms to the poor, but now things are business-like. One makes PR for one's CR activity but avoids labeling it with goodness, even though this might arouse some consumer response. But the internal selling of CR is more important, and not having a claim of profitability would render the activity vulnerable to other departments that want more resources.

The increasing number of people involved in CR can be considered as a growth in the supply of services within this area, but it also has effects on the demand. An effect on the consumer demand is created to some extent, but probably greater has been the influence on the

market by creating a demand internal to the field. Parts of the collegial field generate a supply, which, in turn, creates the demand for one's own services.

An earlier chairman of the U.S. Supreme Court told, on several occasions, an instructive story about a poor lawyer in an American small town. He was the only lawyer in the town, and became even more pessimistic about his future prospects when the news arrived that an additional lawyer would move in. But once the latter opened a practice, the outcome was a prospering business for both of the law offices.

Attraction for Other Groups

There are three groups with many members in the CR collegial field who are not represented among my informants: the verifiers, the communicators, and the media. Those who use the detective strategy "*follow the money*" see just the accounting and communication companies as central in the new "CR industry." Their interest is hardly disputable, but there is reason to comment about some more marginal groups on the fringes of the field.

CR activity can have many internal effects in companies. The informant at CSR Sweden thought that it has raised the status of purchasers. From being primarily a cost activity with focus on low prices, the function has acquired a strategic dimension through *supply chain responsibility*.

Financial analysts and fund managers are a group that acts more as an intermediary for the investors than as "final investors." But *industrial relations* (IR) is largely communication that addresses this group. With recent miserable results for the purely financial prognoses, there is a need to judge other aspects as well, thus recreating a reputation of expertise that has been damaged. The more aspects that are considered, the harder it is for the final investors to find time for following along, and the greater the need to buy special services that carry out the arduous broader analysis, which includes further aspects. Interest grows in having more comprehensive reports about companies. We get a circular causal connection with cumulative effects. Susanne Arvidsson (2009) has investigated the interest in CR among people responsible for IR in the 28 largest Swedish companies. This

interest had advanced from last place to fourth place in a few years. Over 50 percent of respondents classified the CR issue as important. In her dissertation from 2003, she had studied 105 analyst reports and none of them had taken up CR.

The business idea of funds in funds is something like delegating the main task to a “fall guy” if the investment proves bad. A bad investment decision has been made by somebody else. The customer need not change funds because the fund manager has already drawn lessons and reinvested in other funds. To adopt ethical guidelines for the business is another way for the management to give the field instructions and maintain a distance; at the highest level, the responsible decisions have been taken that may be looked for. Cautious decisionmakers find it tempting to insure themselves against criticism by having embraced a number of attractive principles, guidelines, and dialogues.

There is an enthusiasm for arguing that a business case exists for CR, but there is also a low inclination to make this a reality by finding one’s own solutions. Tullberg (2005) discusses different explanations for this “responsive” attitude toward other organizations. What matter are a flexibility and risk minimization, rather than seeking comparative advantages. It can be of interest to study how companies handled the freedom of action that was conveyed by the Swedish company code. Companies have the opportunity to “follow or explain” if they are to avoid being pressured into a uniform “one size fits all” system of rules. Despite the prevailing freedom of action, there is a strong tendency not to deviate. One-third of the companies did not exploit their freedom of action to deviate on any point (a total of 49 items, some of those including several different demands). One-third deviated in a single question, and one-third in two to four questions. No company deviated in more than four questions (Dalborg 2007). The few exceptions to the Swedish company code indicate not only low or reasonable demands, but also a high inclination of adapting to external norm proposals. As well as quantity, the investigation concerned the quality of the explanations for the deviations that occurred. Half had an explanation that was classified as reasonable, but a fourth of the deviations had no explanation at all, and a fourth had a very rudimentary one. Neither do the deviations indicate engagement in the questions. Is there an interest in joint influence that leads to

apathetic compliance toward the results of the process, even if the opportunity exists to choose something else? Not to deviate implies avoidance of being made responsible for a decision, since the joint responsibility for the code itself is very dilute. The collegial field can perhaps be seen as an explanation for this preference of conformity.

Discussion

One kind of demand for CR is from employees. This can be seen as strange from a neoclassical perspective, but in a society shifting from professional roles to identity (Udehn 1996) the perception of the employer as a responsible or irresponsible company affects the identity of the employee. For reasons of motivation, there is also a special interest of companies in employees who connect their identity with that of the company. It seems reasonable that such an identity influence from the company is stronger to the identity of the employee than to the identity of the consumer. Switching employer is of course a much more demanding action than to switch brand, but when in the job searching phase identity effects might be a decisive factor for applying to one company rather than another.

In a strict neoclassic model the product is the actual product that the consumer buys. But there are a lot of characteristics in the enhanced product influencing its evaluation and the consumers' willingness to pay. There is goodwill and badwill in factors such as status, exclusiveness, national characteristics, CEO charisma, and "coolness" of the brand. CR is one of several associated factors added to the basic product to become "the augmented product" (Crane 2001). To what degree the consumer values CR additives is an empirical question.

A third kind of incentive is the long arm of the law, including the threat of a longer arm. A state or the European Union can express a threat of legislation; you voluntarily take initiatives we want you to do, or you will be forced by new legal demands. Voluntary policies have the advantage of protecting pride and offer some maneuvering flexibility for managers. There is no rivalry between these different kinds of demand for CR, but they are complementary. The suggestion here is that there is also a most significant supply side effect on demand. The people doing the job of providing CR have both a motive and a possibility.

There are links to many theories that could be penetrated, but I limit myself to comment on similarity and deviations from two influential contributions. A major idea of Meyer and Rowan (1977) is that independence and legitimacy are important and this is obtained by rationalization of the rules that the leadership enforce in the company. This is expressed in their proposition 6: "Institutionalized organizations seek to minimize inspection and evaluation by both internal managers and external constituents." In contrast the thesis of this article is that company independence is weak and external inspection and evaluation is accepted. There are several forces for isomorphism. Westney (1993) argues for three kinds: coercive by the state, normative by the profession, and mimetic by the company. Here it is suggested that a fourth force, the collegial field, might stimulate homogeneity between organizations.

Collegial fields as a concept might have an explanatory value in a further respect than that of explaining the impact CR has enjoyed. Further research will reveal whether collegial fields are a more general phenomenon when companies, previously separate organizations with a strong hierarchical structure, evolve towards specialization and collaboration. With systems more open to other organizations, horizontal groupings with common interests become more influential. The established concept organizational field captures a convergence between companies in the same industry, while the collegial field is a partial convergence between segments in different organizations that share a common project in a wide sense.

Conclusions

The present article's aim has been to describe the collegial field as a concept and to illustrate its usefulness by examining the influence of a group of professionals from different professions and organizations sharing a special occupational field. The central thesis of the article is that the responsibility collegial field is central not only for effectuating CR activity, but a main force influencing companies to take part in such activities. A genuine and differentiated demand would lead to a divergence of companies' offerings. They would try to achieve comparative advantages and segment the market. This can be seen to

some degree with ecological products, where the companies sell profiled goods with substantial price increments over standard goods. But mostly the responsibility field develops a conventional adaptation to a more demanding standard. Not least, there is a “flight from the bottom”—companies that have been criticized in the press are strongly motivated to avoid it happening again. How high one must go to escape is uncertain, yet the responsibility collegial field has an influence on CR by designing, demanding, and judging.

Without doubt, a genuine consumer interest has been aroused by extensive discussion in the media of issues such as environmental destruction, company closures, child labor, and corruption. Even if one sees the state as having the primary responsibility for many issues, the consumer is eager to give companies a secondary responsibility. Diminished faith in states’ ability to fulfil their responsibility can lead to hope that companies will take greater responsibility. But there are many signs that the consumer’s willingness to pay is limited. Those who act in what is here called the “CR collegial field” have successfully tried to add CR in the basic product and not as an optional choice. It has become part of the components that are expected. Not least, it is a component that is expected by the responsibility professionals outside the company. This collegial demand has a central role.

The idea has been to present a number of factors making a collegial field model for CR a rational hypothesis. Hopefully, this model appears to be a good explanation. There is a rationale for individuals to comply with the collegial general interest. The avoidance of priority issues is a remarkable feature. I think the Darwinian perspective is helpful in understanding the collegial field. Many theories have problems with finding a balance between irrationality and rationality; between “anything goes” to the perfect equilibrium. The trends in variation introduce irrational elements and put managers’ decisions into the right perspective; they perform a preselection highly influenced by significant others. The selection of the market comes at a later stage. There is a memeplex established that together with self-interest of the participants directs the preselection of issues. A cross-hiring of experts in the field, the supply growth of directives, “missionary” clauses, a value chain responsibility, activism by providers of CR services, consultants, and auditing companies, all contribute to a momentum with circular causal connection that has cumulative

effects. Actors in different positions and a set of ideas constitute a friendly environment for compatible memes.

To a substantial degree, an internal review process has avoided the verdict of the market; the judgments of influential others dominate since the evidence about consumer preferences and the selection of the market have been postponed. In the short and medium run a decoupling with the market has been successful, but the long-run outcome is hard to predict. The collegial field might influence the consumer with its arguments, and the strategy of influencing expectations rather than genuine demand might be not only cunning but also effective.

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