

Doctoral thesis in Business and Socioeconomic Sciences (cumulative dissertation)

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**What does it take for actors to collaborate in addressing grand challenges?**

*An inquiry into antecedents of collective organizing efforts  
towards tackling societal grand challenges*

PhD candidate:

Maria Riegler, MSc

Supervisor:

Dr. Markus Scholz, MSc

Dissertation committee members:

Dr. Gastón de los Reyes, JD

Dr. Ivo Ponocny

Dr. Dimitris Christopoulos

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation explores the motivations and circumstances – both at an organizational and at an individual level – underlying actors’ engagement in collective organizing efforts towards addressing grand challenges. Drawing from and contributing to the literature on private governance as well as cross-sector and intra-sector partnerships towards addressing relevant social and/or environmental issues, the articles comprising this thesis contribute to a better understanding of the antecedents of collective organizing efforts towards addressing grand challenges at the individual and the organizational level through a systematic review of the literature as well as qualitative empirical investigations into different types of collective organizing.

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## Abbreviations

CEPI	Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations
COVAX	Covid-19 Vaccines Global Access Facility
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
PCSR	Political Corporate Social Responsibility
UN	United Nations
WHO	World Health Organization

# 1. Introduction

In this section, I will first introduce the concepts of “societal grand challenges” as well as “collective organizing efforts”. Secondly, I will provide an overview of the extant literature on collective organizing efforts towards addressing grand challenges and thirdly, building on this literature review, I will explain the research objective guiding my dissertation project.

In recent years, organization and management scholars have increasingly called for research that addresses societal grand challenges such as aging societies, climate change, gender inequality, human rights issues, or poverty (George et al., 2016). This renewed and intensified focus on grand challenges by organization and management scholars in the past few years reflects an understanding that businesses and organizations in general play an important role both in tackling as well as in aggravating grand challenges (Ferraro et al., 2015; George et al., 2016). As Gümüşay et al. (2022) argue, organizations often contribute to exacerbating grand challenges, e.g., when they engage in practices that lead to negative societal outcomes, however, organizations may also contribute to addressing grand challenges through individual and collective action. The latter, i.e., collective organizing efforts towards addressing grand challenges, is the focus of this thesis.

## *1.1 Understanding grand challenges*

George et al. (2016, p. 1881) conceptualize grand challenges as “specific critical barrier(s) that, if removed, would help solve an important societal problem with a high likelihood of global impact through widespread implementation”. The concept of grand challenges shares similarities with other concepts such as “wicked problems” (Reinecke & Ansari, 2016; Rittel & Webber, 1973) and collective action problems (Hardin, 1968; Ostrom, 2010). Wicked problems are complex social issues that are impossible or difficult to solve because they are “caught in causal webs of interlinking variables spanning national boundaries that complicate both their diagnosis and prognosis” (Reinecke & Ansari, 2016, p. 299). This means that it is

difficult or even impossible to define wicked problems, identify directly traceable causes, and develop definitive and universally agreed-upon solutions (Reinecke & Ansari, 2016; Waddock, 2008). Collective action problems are predominantly discussed in the institutional economics literature (Ostrom, 1999). In short, this concept refers to dilemmas in which individuals have unrestricted access to shared resources and, as utility-maximizers, their independent, self-interested behaviour leads to “congestion, overuse, and even the destruction of the resource itself” (Ostrom, 1999, p. 498). Overall, the concept of grand challenges bears a resemblance to wicked problems and commons problems. To provide an example, climate change has been conceptualized by different scholars as a grand challenge (Ferraro et al., 2015), as a (“super”) wicked problem (Crowley & Head, 2017; Wohlgezogen et al., 2020), and as a commons problem (Ostrom, 2014; Stavins, 2011) in the extant literature. While the exact definitions and inclusion criteria differ to some extent, I will use the concept of grand challenges as an umbrella term to refer to important and complex societal issues that cannot be effectively addressed through individual action.

Ferraro et al. (2015, p. 364) identify complexity, uncertainty, and “evaluativeness” as the three central characteristics of grand challenges:

*“First, grand challenges are complex, entailing many interactions and associations, emergent understandings, and nonlinear dynamics. Second, grand challenges confront organizations with radical uncertainty, by which we mean that actors cannot define the possible future states of the world, and therefore cannot forecast the consequences of their present actions, or whether future others will appreciate them. And third, grand challenges are evaluative, cutting across jurisdictional boundaries, implicating multiple criteria of worth, and revealing new concerns even as they are being tackled. Taken together, these three facets pose formidable organizational challenges.”*

The evaluative aspect of grand challenges implies that different actors may not always agree on what an effective or desirable solution to a specific grand challenge should look like. What makes grand challenges particularly complex is that they are often interwoven and new challenges can emerge quickly, as demonstrated by the Covid-19 crisis (Gümüşay et al., 2022).

Following the call for research on grand challenges, scholars have investigated individual and organizational action to address concrete problems such as poverty or climate change (Battilana & Dorado, 2010; Mair et al., 2012; Wijen & Ansari, 2007), as well as action focused on closing governance gaps through private governance (Bartley, 2007; Eberlein, 2019; Levy et al., 2016).

## ***1.2 Collective organizing***

What the extant discussions of grand challenges have in common is the idea that grand challenges, “by their very nature, require coordinated and sustained effort from multiple and diverse stakeholders toward a clearly articulated problem or goal” (George et al., 2016, p. 1881). Building on this idea, “collective organizing efforts” (Mitzinneck & Besharov, 2019) have been increasingly discussed as a potentially powerful tool that, if successful, can change the actors’ institutional environment and thereby help address grand societal challenges (Gray & Purdy, 2018; Howard-Grenville, 2021). While the concept of collective organizing has received increasing attention from research and practice in recent years (de Bakker et al., 2019; Grabs et al., 2020; Mitzinneck & Besharov, 2019), academic research on it began decades ago. Building upon Olson’s (2002/1965, p. 7) conceptualization of collective action as “actions taken to advance the common interests of groups of individuals”, Scott and Marshall (2009, p. 96) define collective action as “the action taken by a group (either directly or on its behalf through an organization) in pursuit of members’ perceived shared interests”.

Based on the types of actors involved, such collective organizing efforts can be distinguished into at least the following categories: cross-sector partnerships (Clarke & Crane, 2018; Selsky & Parker, 2005) and their sub-category of multi-stakeholder partnerships (Baumann-Pauly et al., 2017; de Bakker et al., 2019), strategic environmental alliances (Bowen et al., 2018; Lin & Darnall, 2015), and social movements (Reinecke, 2018; van Wijk et al., 2013).

Based on their focus, collective organizing efforts aimed at governance (“coordinated action”, i.e., standard-setting initiatives) can be distinguished from those that are aimed at collaboration



and knowledge exchange (“collaborative action”, i.e., collaborative partnerships) (Bowen et al., 2018; see also Riegler & Scholz, 2020), although this distinction is somewhat fuzzy since some private governance initiatives also have established platforms for learning and collaboration (e.g., the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh, see Donaghey & Reinecke, 2018) and some collaborative initiatives have defined a set of principle-based standards (e.g., the case studied in paper four of this dissertation, see Riegler, under review).

In what follows, I will describe the main commonalities of the different types of collective organizing and then introduce each type sequentially.

Since the various types of collective organizing efforts differ in terms of composition of actors, temporal horizon, level of formal organization as well as the degree of strategic orientation, it is difficult to provide a universal definition. What the different types of collective organizing efforts have in common, however, is that they are usually formed by **multiple actors** (individuals or organizations) who **voluntarily** engage in collective activities to reach a **common objective** that, in the context of this thesis, is restricted to addressing a certain social and/or environmental issue. The different types and theoretical conceptualizations of collective organizing efforts are introduced below.

### 1.2.1 Cross-sector partnerships

Cross-sector partnerships are “relatively intensive, long-term interactions between organizations from at least two sectors (business, government, and/or civil society) aimed at addressing a social or environmental problem” (Clarke & Crane, 2018, p. 303)<sup>1</sup>. These partnerships differ largely in size, scope, and goals. In terms of size, cross-sector partnerships

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<sup>1</sup> This definition of cross-sector partnerships which uses the focus on social issues as a basic premise is not universally agreed upon in the extant literature. As an example, Sloan and Oliver (2013, p. 1837) define multi-stakeholder partnerships as “formalized arrangements in which organizations from diverse sectors [...] commit to work together in mutually beneficial ways to accomplish goals that they could otherwise not achieve alone”, thereby emphasizing a “win-win” focus in contrast to the social impact focus suggested by Selsky and Parker (2005).

range from dyadic relationships to networks comprising a large number of different organizations. As a specific subcategory of cross-sector partnerships, multi-stakeholder partnerships contain at least one stakeholder from each of the economic sectors. Cross-sector partnerships are also diverse regarding geographic and temporal scope. Such partnerships may be short-term and constrained to a specific project or longer-term and open-ended. They can also be self-interest-oriented or common-interest-oriented (Selsky & Parker, 2005). In addition to this, cross-sector partnerships can be governance-oriented or implementation-oriented. Examples of cross-sector partnerships include the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) (Bush & Oosterveer, 2015), the UN Global Compact (Rasche & Waddock, 2014) and, at a much smaller scale, the “Pestizidreduktionsprogramm”, a collaboration between an Austrian supermarket chain and a nongovernmental organization (Christanell et al., 2019).

### **1.2.2 Intra-sector partnerships**

Intra-sector partnerships – more commonly called strategic alliances in the literature – focusing on social or environmental issues, in contrast, are usually set up as partnerships among two or more companies. They can be defined as “voluntary collaborations between organizations that involve product exchange, sharing or codevelopment, technology development or the provision of services that pursue a common set of goals” (Lin & Darnall, 2015, p. 549). The concept of strategic alliances was originally used by strategy scholars investigating how firms can strengthen their competitive position through strategic alliances by increasing market power, decreasing costs or enabling them to access new resources or markets (Prashant & Harbir, 2009). In recent years, a new research stream emerged that focuses on strategic *environmental* alliances (Christ et al., 2017; Niesten & Jolink, 2020; Stadtler & Lin, 2017). While the term strategic alliances usually refers to collaborative arrangements, the term industry self-regulation is most commonly used for governance-oriented partnerships among companies within a specific industry (King et al., 2012). One of the most prominent examples of industry self-

regulation is arguably the chemical industry's Responsible Care Program (King & Lenox, 2000).

### **1.2.3 Social movements**

Social movements, another form of collective organizing, can be defined as “sustained challenges to powerholders in the name of a disadvantaged population” (Tarrow, 1996, p. 874). Social movements “hold conflictual relations to clearly identified opponents; connect through dense informal networks [and] share a distinct collective identity” (Della Porta & Diani, 2020, p. 21). While a large part of social movement research has focused on understanding political activism by marginalized actors (e.g., the American civil rights movement), scholars have also drawn from social movement research to understand the political dynamics between business actors, civil society, and the state from which private governance arrangements can emerge (Bartley, 2007; Levy et al., 2016; Reinecke, 2018).

As Gray et al. (2022) highlight, and as discussed in the previous section, addressing grand challenges usually requires action spanning organizational, sectoral, and often even national borders. Collective organizing efforts allow for the pooling of expertise and resources and thereby “have the potential to institute field-level changes that can begin to resolve these complex problems” – either through direct action or through changing the governance structure regarding a specific problem (Gray et al., 2022, p. 2). In this context, it is worth noting that no collective organizing effort can be expected to solve a given grand challenge on its own since its impact on the grand challenge in focus will usually be marginal; however, taken together, the various actions by both private and public actors at different scales aimed at creating “value to society” (King et al., 2012, p. 116) may make a noticeable impact (Ostrom, 2010).

### ***1.3 What is known about collective organizing towards addressing grand challenges***

Broadly speaking, two main theoretical perspectives have been applied to understanding collective organizing efforts: (1) institutional economics and (2) organizational institutionalism.

#### **1.3.1 Institutional economist perspectives on collective action**

According to institutional economics, “the term ‘collective action’ refers to settings where decisions about costly actions are made independently but outcomes jointly affect everyone involved” (Ostrom, 2010, p. 551). If the individual decisions do not lead to an “efficient allocation of goods and services” (King et al., 2012, p. 116), i.e., in the face of market failure, the institutions shaping “the rules of the game” (North, 1990/2009) need to be changed. Two main types of market failure are central to institutional economic scholarship: information asymmetry and externalities. Collective organizing – both in terms of coordination and in terms of collaboration, may alleviate both types of market failure, although institutional economics mainly focuses on contractual and industry self-regulatory strategies towards institutional change (King et al., 2012).

According to the institutional economic perspective, “rational egoist” actors will only contribute to institution-formation (or institutional change) if their anticipated individual benefits from cooperating exceed the costs thereof (Potoski & Prakash, 2013; Zeyen et al., 2016). However, as Ostrom (2010, p. 551) emphasizes, “individuals are boundedly rational and do seek benefits for self but vary in their other-regarding preferences and norms about the appropriate actions they should take in particular settings”, which implies that, depending on the context, actors’ willingness to cooperate may vary substantially. Institutional economists, thus, have studied incentives to cooperate (e.g., reputational benefits, cost reductions, reacting to regulatory threats; see Bowman & Hodge, 2009; Héritier & Eckert, 2009; Lenox, 2006) and conditions as well as actor characteristics that may facilitate or hinder collective action (e.g.,

number and heterogeneity of actors, trust, initial environmental performance; see Boroomand & Kaul, 2022; King & Lenox, 2000; Ostrom, 2010). In particular, much of institutional economic research has focused on understanding free-riding (i.e., an actor gaining benefits from a voluntary standard without adopting it, see e.g., Conley & Williams, 2011) and shirking (i.e., formally adopting a voluntary standard without actually implementing it, also called second-order free-riding, see e.g., Lenox & Nash, 2003; Potoski & Prakash, 2009) as two behaviours that can make cooperation too costly for other actors and therefore deter them from participating.

### **1.3.2 Organizational institutional perspectives on collective action**

The organizational institutionalist perspective, in contrast, is rooted in sociology, mostly informed by qualitative and conceptual work, and focuses more strongly on informal institutions such as routines, practices, as well as (informal) norms and belief systems (Pacheco et al., 2010). In this context, institutions can be understood as “templates for action, as well as regulative mechanisms that enforce those templates” (Lawrence et al., 2009b, p. 7).

Organizational institutional scholars, for a long time, mostly focused on macro-level dynamics and on the way individual as well as collective action is shaped by institutions (Creed et al., 2020; Lawrence et al., 2009b). Arguably most prominently, DiMaggio and Powell (1983) explained how different institutional pressures drive organizations to adapt to their institutional context in order to maintain their legitimacy. Regarding macro-level dynamics contributing to institution-formation, the concept of “contestation” has been discussed in the literature: Institutional scholars have argued that the emergence of private governance institutions is not merely the result of strategic decision-making but rather the result of political conflicts involving the state, industry actors and civil society organizations (Bartley, 2007; Campbell, 2007). The institutions that emerge might not be a single actor group’s optimal institutions, but instead represent the results of strategies and counterstrategies by different actor groups

(Bartley, 2007). Another related concept is that of “tipping points” or “critical junctures”, the latter being borrowed from historical institutional theory (Dashwood, 2014). According to this idea, institution-formation cannot be solely explained by a static cost-benefit model of rational decision-making, but rather by an industry facing multiple pressures simultaneously that can culminate in a critical juncture in which industry actors are forced to collectively solve their problems (Dashwood, 2014).

In the past two decades, some organizational institutional scholars have increasingly shifted their focus towards creating a deeper understanding of how actors maintain and change their institutional environment and acknowledging a “recursive relationship between institutions and action” (Lawrence et al., 2009b, p. 7). In this context, Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) understand institutional work as the actions taken by individuals, groups of individuals, or organizations that are aimed at changing or maintaining their institutional environment when this institutional environment is questioned. DiMaggio (1988) coined the term “institutional entrepreneurship” for studying the phenomenon of actors engaging in efforts to create institutions and the strategies they use (DiMaggio, 1988; Lawrence et al., 2009b). Lawrence et al. (2009b) caution that both intentionality and accomplishment (or success) raise a host of complex questions in the context of institutional theory due to the recursive relationship between intentional and unintentional actions and institutions. Yet scholars have begun to explore actions that were “‘aimed’ at creating or transforming some set of institutions” (Lawrence et al., 2009b, p. 14). As an example, Battilana et al. (2009) suggest a theory of institutional entrepreneurship in which they distinguish two categories of enabling conditions: field characteristics and the actors’ social position. Fan and Zietsma (2017) discuss emotional facilitators that can provoke changes in openness and reflexivity, engagement, and commitment in the context of constructing a shared institutional logic. However, the role of individuals and their intentions,

motivations and values, in creating or changing institutions are still under-researched (Creed et al., 2020).

#### ***1.4 Research gaps and research objective***

While the literature on collective organizing efforts is rich, many questions remain to be answered and my PhD project aims to explore some of them. Reviewing the extant literature on grand challenges, Howard-Grenville and Spengler (2022) observe that “while scholars are devising tools for coordinating and collaborating, they are not yet looking at the antecedents and consequences of these tools” (Howard-Grenville & Spengler, 2022, p. 289). All four articles in this PhD project aim to help close this research gap regarding the antecedents for coordinating and collaborating towards tackling grand challenges by investigating why and under what circumstances actors engage in collective organizing efforts. The overarching research objective, thus, is to investigate the motivations and circumstances – both at an organizational and at an individual level – underlying actors’ engagement in collective organizing efforts towards addressing grand challenges. A more detailed overview of the relevant research gaps is provided in what follows.

First, the extant literature on collective organizing efforts is fragmented into a variety of academic fields and sub-fields that currently do not sufficiently communicate with each other. Particularly the antecedents of collective organizing efforts have not been investigated systematically. By means of a systematic review of the literature, we aim to connect the different discourses and thereby help to pave the way for more interdisciplinary research on the phenomenon in the future. Although we focus on the antecedents of company engagement in collective forms of private governance as a specific subset of collective organizing efforts, we believe that our suggested framework is relevant to the broader discourse on collective organizing towards tackling grand challenges as well as on the political responsibilities of companies. In addition to this, the systematic review helped me understand current gaps and

imbalances in the extant literature and thereby allowed me to design the remainder of my PhD project in a way that addresses some of the identified gaps and imbalances.

Second, partnerships *between* companies that have explicit social and/or environmental objectives are a specific type of collective organizing effort that has received little scholarly attention thus far. The extant literature on strategic alliances (i.e., partnerships between companies that are focused on business objectives) and cross-sector partnerships (i.e., partnerships between actors of at least two different economic sectors) is rich. However, the motivations and circumstances underlying company engagement in business partnerships for social and/or environmental goals might differ from what we know about other company engagement in other collaborative arrangements. Stadtler and Lin (2017) conducted a quantitative study of company engagement in strategic environmental alliances building on secondary data. Building on and extending their proposed framework, we provide qualitative in-depth insights into the antecedents of company engagement in business partnerships with social and/or environmental objectives.

Third, company engagement in collective organizing efforts raises questions about the political role and responsibilities of business – particularly in the context of grand challenges and global governance gaps. The literature on Political Corporate Social Responsibility (PCSR) has provided normative arguments for why companies may have political responsibilities (Scherer et al., 2006; Scherer & Palazzo, 2011), however the assumptions underlying PCSR theory regarding companies' motivations are contested in the extant literature and thus far, much of the research on PCSR has been conceptual (Scholz et al., 2022/forthcoming). Using the Covid-19 pandemic, an “extreme context” (Rouleau et al., 2021) as a critical test for PCSR theory, we empirically investigated the factors facilitating and hindering pharmaceutical company engagement with COVAX – a global multi-stakeholder initiative founded to ensure global equitable access to Covid-19 vaccines.



Fourth, as identified in our systematic review (Riegler & Scholz, under review) and as argued by many others (Creed et al., 2020; Haack et al., 2020), the microfoundations underlying institution-formation are underexplored. While scholars have focused on the actions taken by actors aiming to change institutions (Battilana et al., 2009; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010; Zilber, 2007), on field-level enabling conditions (such as crises or the heterogeneity and degree of institutionalization in a field, see e.g., Greenwood et al., 2002; Oliver, 1991), and on the organizational level (see e.g., Bertels & Lawrence, 2016; Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006), the forces animating individuals to engage in creating institutional change are not well understood (Creed et al., 2020; Lawrence et al., 2009b). Through a qualitative, explorative single-case study, I aim to investigate the underlying dynamics of actors' engagement in creating institutional change within management academia.

## **2 Overview of the articles included in this PhD thesis<sup>2</sup>**

As described in detail in the previous section, the overarching research objective is to investigate the motivations and circumstances – both at an organizational and at an individual level – underlying actors’ engagement in collective organizing efforts towards addressing grand challenges.

To achieve this objective, this project started out with a systematic review of the literature on company engagement in the creation of private governance to obtain a structured overview of the extant literature that is currently fragmented into different academic fields and sub-fields. In the systematic review, we identified several research gaps and potential imbalances, particularly (1) lack of research on contextual aspects, (2) lack of research regarding the micro (i.e., individual; especially regarding individuals’ motivations, intentions, and values) and meso level (i.e., organizational; especially regarding company strategy, internal decision-making processes as well as moral orientations), (3) potential selection bias regarding the cases studied (strong focus on industries and cases that faced strong reputational and regulatory pressures prior to creating private governance) and, following from this, (4) potential “business case” bias (i.e., since the extant literature mostly focuses on private governance emergence in industries that faced reputational and regulatory pressures, e.g., due to scandals or accidents, it is not surprising that reputation-associated and regulation-associated drivers for company engagement in creating private governance are dominant in the extant literature).

The empirical articles in this project are aimed at addressing some of these gaps and imbalances. The empirical research for paper 2, focusing on company engagement in business partnerships with social and/or environmental objectives, was conducted to gain a better understanding of contextual aspects, to look at a broader range of companies and industries, and to better

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<sup>2</sup> For the full articles, see Appendix.

understand companies' decision-making processes prior to engaging. While we were able to contribute to a better understanding of the motivations and circumstances underlying companies' engagement in such partnerships, we could not cover all the relevant aspects. In particular, the factors at the micro level could only be analyzed rather superficially on the basis of the data gathered in paper 2.

The goal of paper 3 was to develop a better understanding of the role of companies' moral orientations and overall strategies as well as contextual aspects in relation to their engagement in collective organizing towards addressing grand challenges (thereby addressing part of gaps 1 and 2 identified in the systematic review) and to discuss the normative implications of companies' engagement (or lack thereof). Through analyzing the contemporary phenomenon of pharmaceutical company engagement with COVAX, we had the opportunity to gain a better understanding of companies' moral orientations and strategies as well as of contextual aspects that may facilitate or inhibit their engagement. Regarding normative implications, the role of companies in collective organizing efforts is not undisputed. Some scholars argue that companies as corporate citizens have an implied political responsibility to engage "in public deliberations, collective decisions, and the provision of public goods or the restriction of public goods in cases where public authorities are unable or unwilling to fulfil this role" (Scherer et al., 2016, p. 276). Other scholars have argued that companies have no social responsibilities besides making profits and following the rules of the game (most famously Friedman, 1970) or that expecting multinational companies to take their political responsibilities seriously and thereby contribute to the public good would be naïve (Rhode & Fleming, 2020; Whelan, 2012). While we do not aim to settle this debate or state who might be right, our empirical data allows us to add some nuance to the debate.

Finally, paper 4 strongly focuses on micro-level factors underlying collective organizing efforts to address a grand challenge and thereby addresses gaps 1 and 2 identified in the systematic

literature review. The empirical investigation was conducted to provide an in-depth understanding of individuals' motivations, intentions, and values in relation to their engagement in a collective organizing effort. In particular, I aimed to understand what factors were decisive in animating these actors to become active.

Taken together, my empirical research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the antecedents of collective organizing efforts towards addressing grand challenges through (1) gaining a better understanding of certain contextual aspects, (2) providing more in-depth insights into relevant factors at the micro and meso level, (3) taking into account companies and industries that had been underexplored and thereby helping address the potential selection bias, and (4) discussing the normative implications of the phenomenon explored in this PhD project.

## ***2.1 The antecedents of company engagement in creating private governance: A systematic literature review and research agenda***

Authors: Maria Riegler, Markus Scholz

### **2.1.1 Introduction**

This article provides a systematic review of the literature on company engagement in the creation of private governance and a research agenda. We focus on a specific subset of collective organizing efforts, namely company engagement in creating collective principles-based or certification-based standards to address social and/or environmental issues (ranging from industry-wide codes of ethics like the Guiding Principles of Responsible Care in the chemical industry, see King and Lenox (2000), to certification schemes like the Forest Stewardship Council, see Auld (2014)). This means that we are interested in instances in which companies participated in the creation of a specific social or environmental standard through a collective effort involving other companies (and optionally additional stakeholders such as representatives from civil society or governments).

Private governance has been frequently discussed in the extant literature as a potentially effective instrument to close governance gaps, i.e., the lack of effective rules and enforcement mechanisms to regulate business behavior (Crane et al., 2019; Eberlein, 2019). Governance gaps occur when national governments are unable or unwilling to create regulations that effectively address a given societally relevant problem (Riegler & Scholz, under review). The main sources of these governance gaps, according to the literature, are rapid innovation (Bowman & Hodge, 2009), a lack of insider knowledge and expertise for identifying and ameliorating systemic risks on the part of regulators (Donaldson & Schoemaker, 2013; Pattberg, 2005), weak or inadequate existing regulations (Campbell, 2007; de los Reyes et al., 2017), and, at the global level, a lack of effective global governance institutions (Eberlein, 2019; Schrage & Gilbert, 2019; Vogel, 2010).

Private governance aimed at closing governance gaps is particularly relevant in the context of grand challenges for two reasons: Firstly, when national governments as well as supranational bodies fail to create regulations that may help tackle certain grand challenges, private governance may be a (or, in some cases, even the only) viable alternative. Secondly, some grand challenges are so complex that a multitude of initiatives from a broad variety of actors may be necessary to create sufficient impact towards tackling the given challenges. In practice, we see that a variety of private governance regimes have emerged, many of them created or co-created by companies. Before this backdrop, we argue that it is relevant to understand why and under what circumstances companies actually engage in creating private governance.

The underlying research motivation for our article is that the extant literature on private governance in general and on company engagement in creating private governance in particular is highly fragmented in various academic fields and sub-fields that are currently insufficiently connected (i.e., business ethics, economics, legal studies, political studies etc.). This makes it difficult to obtain a complete understanding of the circumstances under which companies

engage in private governance and, as a consequence, this current fragmentation poses a hindrance to theory development (Riegler & Scholz, under review). In addition to this, we have found an imbalance in the current literature regarding theoretical perspectives used and cases investigated that, we fear, may result in misleading conclusions about company engagement in private governance. We therefore decided to conduct a systematic literature review that brings together the research on company engagement in creating private governance that was published in a diverse set of academic fields. Our systematic review thereby also makes gaps and imbalances in the extant literature visible and gives us the opportunity to suggest an extensive research agenda to move private governance research forward.

### **2.1.2 Research design**

A systematic literature review was the methodology of choice because a systematic approach is necessary to understand fully what is currently known and not known about the antecedents of company engagement in private governance. The existing heterogeneity in writing styles, methods, and theoretical approaches in the extant literature does not allow for a meta-analytical approach, which is why an inductive, qualitative analysis of the reviewed articles was conducted. In conducting the systematic review, we drew from the methodology as described by Denyer and Tranfield (2009). Web of Science and Scopus were used as databases for conducting the search because they are the largest and most complete databases for peer-reviewed scientific research in the relevant academic fields. Clear inclusion criteria were defined to ensure that articles were selected systematically. In addition to this, the selection of 537 articles remaining after initial refinements and the screening of titles and abstracts were read in full (manual relevance screening). When both authors agreed on the relevance of the article, it was included in the review. When disagreements occurred in the author team, the respective articles were discussed until a consensus was found. In this step, our approach was similar to the one followed by de Bakker et al. (2019).

### **2.1.3 Delineation of own work from my co-author's work:**

I contributed the following to the article:

- Development of research idea, research question, and research design
- Conducting a systematic literature search in two databases
- Automatic and manual filtering of the search results
- Descriptive statistics
- Qualitative analysis of the content of the articles
- Writing the article (in an iterative manner, including several rounds of feedback and editing work by Markus Scholz)
- Preparing the submission to Journal of Management Studies and (together with Markus Scholz) completing two rounds of extensive revisions, including an update of the search and analysis. After the ultimate rejection at Journal of Management Studies, preparation of the submission to International Journal of Management Reviews.

### **2.1.4 Timeline and current status of the article**

I started working on this systematic review article in fall 2017. The first draft of this manuscript was submitted to the Society for Business Ethics Annual Conference in February 2018 and subsequently presented at the conference in August 2018. After major revisions, the manuscript was submitted to the Journal of Management Studies (JMS) in January 2020. The manuscript was eventually rejected after the third review round in fall 2021 (following two rounds of major revisions, including an update of the search and analysis). Following the advice of our editor at JMS, we submitted the article to the International Journal of Management Reviews where it received an invitation to revise and resubmit (due in fall 2022).

## ***2.2 Antecedents of company engagement in business partnerships for sustainability***

Authors: Maria Riegler, Anna Burton, Markus Scholz, Katharina Jarmai

### **2.2.1 Introduction**

Besides coordinative efforts aimed at creating private governance, partnerships focused on collaboratively addressing concrete social and/or environmental issues are the second type of collective action which I am studying. As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, collaborative partnerships have been discussed as an important instrument to address grand challenges, including efforts to foster social and environmental sustainability.

This article focuses on partnerships that take place primarily *between* companies and are aimed at addressing grand societal challenges. Expanding the definition by Niesten and Jolink (2020), in our article we define business partnerships for sustainability as “voluntary collaborative arrangements between firms and (optionally) additional stakeholders with the aim to exchange or co-develop knowledge to create economic as well as social and/or environmental value” (Riegler et al., under review, p. 3).

In the extant literature, such partnership arrangements have been called “coopetition for sustainability” (see e.g., Christ et al., 2017) or “strategic environmental alliances” (see e.g., Lin & Darnall, 2015). While the literature on partnerships is growing, in-depth insights into the factors at the organizational and individual level that lead companies to engage in such partnerships are currently lacking.

For this article, we decided to conduct a qualitative inquiry into antecedents of company engagement in such partnerships, building upon an existing theoretical framework suggested by Stadtler and Lin (2017). Stadtler and Lin (2017) argued that the Awareness-Motivation-Capability framework, originally conceptualized by Chen (1996) to study interfirm rivalry and competitive tension, could be applied to the study of interfirm collaboration. Chen (1996)



conceptualized awareness, motivation and capability as the essential factors underlying organizational action: “the *awareness* of interfirm relationships and action implications, the *motivation* to act, and the *capability* of taking action” (Chen, 1996, p. 105).” In their quantitative study based on secondary data, Stadtler and Lin (2017) identify relevant factors in the awareness, motivation, and capability dimensions that may explain company engagement in alliances oriented towards sustainable development.

The following research questions guided our empirical research for this article (Riegler et al., under review): (1) What are the antecedents at the individual and organizational level of company engagement in business partnerships for sustainability? (2) Building on this, how can the Awareness-Motivation-Capability framework be advanced to provide a more nuanced understanding of company engagement?

We build upon Stadtler and Lin’s (2017) work in our empirical investigation of company engagement in business partnerships for sustainability and thereby follow a suggestion made by the authors themselves, who stated that “[f]uture studies can complement this view by analyzing the [awareness, motivation, and/or capability] factors in greater depth through qualitative research” (Stadtler & Lin, 2017, p. 728).

### **2.2.2 Research design**

Based on the suggestion made by Stadtler and Lin (2017) to expand their proposed framework through in-depth qualitative research, we decided to conduct semi-structured interviews with representatives of companies to identify awareness, motivation, and capability factors associated with the companies’ engagement in business partnerships with social and/or environmental objectives. We followed a purposive sampling technique: First to identify potentially relevant interviewees (that fulfilled our inclusion criteria detailed in the article) through an initial online screening and secondly to decide in an iterative manner whom else we should interview throughout the course of data collection (with the intent to vary reasonably

along company size, age, and focus of the partnership). Our goal was to gain a rich understanding of the decisions and processes happening in the initiation phase of partnerships from the perspective of the employees or managers responsible for participating in the respective partnership, which is why qualitative semi-structured interviews were the data collection instrument of our choice. The first round of data analysis was done inductively by two researchers and in a second step, codes were condensed into core concepts. If disagreements arose, the researchers discussed until a consensus could be found. In a later step, the framework proposed by Stadtler and Lin (2017) was used as a loose guiding lens to structure our themes, and expanded where analytically necessary – similar to the approach taken by Spence and Rinaldi (2014).

### **2.2.3 Delineation of own work from co-authors' work**

I contributed the following to the article:

- Development of research idea, research question, and research design (alone, but with guidance by Markus Scholz)
- Writing the literature review and setting up the theoretical framing of the article (alone)
- Selecting and contacting interviewees (together with Katharina Jarmai, both contributing equally)
- Conducting interviews (I conducted 14 interviews)
- Analyzing interviews (together with Katharina Jarmai, both contributing equally)
- Writing the first version of the paper (together with Katharina Jarmai, both contributing equally)
- Presenting the paper (as the sole presenter) at EGOS 2021

- Substantially revising the paper, including a re-analysis of the data (together with Anna Burton; I contributed approx. 65 %) based on the feedback received at EGOS 2021
- Preparing the submission to Business Strategy and the Environment
- Presenting the updated paper at the ISBEE 2022 (together with Anna Burton) and at the Academy of Management (AoM) Annual Meeting 2022 (alone)

#### **2.2.4 Timeline and current status of the article**

Interview data were collected in two rounds in summer 2020 and spring 2021. A short paper was submitted to the European Group for Organization Studies (EGOS) colloquium in February 2021 and presented at the conference in July 2021. After major revisions, the manuscript was submitted to “Business Strategy and the Environment”, where it received an invitation to revise and resubmit (due in fall 2022).

### ***2.3 Public health and political corporate social responsibility: Pharmaceutical company engagement with COVAX***

Authors: Markus Scholz, N. Craig Smith, Maria Riegler, Anna Burton

#### **2.3.1 Introduction**

Before the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic, a global health crisis of a scale unprecedented in our lifetimes, this article discusses the engagement of pharmaceutical companies in ensuring global equitable access to Covid-19 vaccines, i.e., company engagement in a (collaborative) collective organizing effort aimed at addressing a societal grand challenge. In this introduction, I will briefly describe the research context, the theoretical background, and our article’s contribution to the literature.

The research context of this article is the Covid-19 pandemic and the behaviour of vaccine-producing pharmaceutical companies. Early in the pandemic, a global multi-stakeholder partnership called COVAX (the Covid-19 Vaccines Global Access Facility) was established by CEPI; Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance; and the WHO. The declared goal of COVAX was to ensure global equitable access to Covid-19 vaccines for the most vulnerable in all participating economies in the face of expected supply shortages (Gavi, 2021; Yamey et al., 2020). To reach this goal, firstly, a financing system was established to support low- and middle-income countries in procuring vaccines (Gavi, 2021). Secondly, COVAX established Advance Market Commitments with manufacturers of vaccine candidates. Thirdly, allocation principles as well as priority stages were defined along which the vaccines were supposed to be distributed to all countries participating in COVAX (WHO, 2021). COVAX faced multiple challenges; the major ones included raising sufficient funds and securing sufficient commitments from promising vaccine candidates.

Drawing from the literature on political corporate social responsibility (PCSR) as most dominantly popularized by Scherer and Palazzo (2007, 2011, cf. Scherer et al., 2006), this article sets out with the normative position that vaccine manufacturers “have extended responsibilities towards society and should engage in the provision of public goods, i.e., in public health and the protection of human rights” (Scholz et al., 2022/forthcoming, p. 6), particularly when the state fails to do so. As discussed in our article in greater detail, PCSR theory has been criticized for being naïve about companies’ motivations. We argue that the Covid-19 pandemic in general and pharmaceutical company engagement with COVAX can serve as a critical test for PCSR theory in an extreme context (Scholz et al., 2022/forthcoming), which is why we set out to explore the motivations of pharmaceutical companies to engage with COVAX. Our findings partly support the PCSR critics in that companies’ engagement with COVAX can largely be explained by self-interested reasons. However, our results also suggest

that political-institutional factors as well as moral factors are relevant to understanding the substantially different levels of engagement.

We explain in our article (Scholz et al., 2022/forthcoming) that ultimately, as anticipated on the basis of historical precedent (Leisinger, 2009; Yamey et al., 2020), the global allocation of effective Covid-19 vaccines turned out to be inequitable. The main reason for this was that high-income countries struck direct deals with vaccine manufacturers and some of those manufacturers sold the vaccines to the highest bidders – a dynamic also referred to as “vaccine nationalism” (Milne & Crow, 2020). The global inequitable allocation of Covid-19 vaccines thus posed a classic collective action problem in that the self-interested behaviour of high-income countries combined with the self-interested behaviour of pharmaceutical companies did not lead to the optimal outcome from a global public health perspective (Scholz et al., 2022/forthcoming). Based on our findings, we discuss a range of implications for both theory and practice.

### **2.3.2 Research design**

Since research on PCSR has thus far been mostly conceptual and the pandemic was still unfolding as we started our research for this article, we decided early to follow a qualitative, explorative approach. This approach was also consistent with our overall research objectives: to gain in-depth insights into factors facilitating and hindering company engagement with COVAX and to understand different stakeholders’ perspectives on this issue. Therefore, we conducted qualitative, semi-structured interviews with key COVAX stakeholders. In addition to this, we conducted a media analysis to compare and contrast our interview findings.

We limited the collection of interview data to a period from mid-February 2021 to mid-May 2021. This way, we could conduct interviews as the pandemic still unfolded but minimize the risk that our research subject changed substantially during data collection. To strengthen the validity of our findings, we compared interview data with our findings from the media analysis

as well as with COVAX brochures and fact sheets. In addition to this, the analysis was conducted by two researchers who compared their findings and discussed differences extensively. We also constructed a detailed chronology of events and, for the analysis of interview data, drew from extant research on cross-sector partnerships.

### **2.3.3 Delineation of own work from co-authors' work:**

I made the following contributions to this article:

- Contributing to defining the research objective, research question and research design (together with Markus Scholz and Craig Smith)
- Developing the theoretical framing and theoretical contribution together with Markus Scholz (both contributing equally)
- Contributing to writing a short paper that was presented in January 2021 together with Markus Scholz and Craig Smith (all authors contributed equally)
- Conducting interviews together with the co-authors (I was involved in 15 interviews)
- Analyzing the interviews (together with Anna Burton, both contributing equally)
- Conducting the media analysis (together with Anna Burton, both contributing equally)
- Writing the theory section (alone); writing the research context, methods, and results sections together with Anna Burton (both contributing equally); contributing substantially to introduction and discussion.
- Contributing to two rounds of revisions (all authors contributed approx. equally)
- Presenting the article at ISBEE 2022 (together with Anna Burton) and at SBE 2022 (together with Craig Smith)

### **2.3.4 Timeline and current status of the article**

We submitted an extended abstract to the Business & Society Special Issue call for papers in December 2021. Interviews were conducted between February and May 2021, the media

analysis was conducted in May 2021, and the manuscript was submitted to Business & Society at the end of May 2021. After two rounds of revisions, the manuscript was accepted for publication in Business & Society on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2022.

## ***2.4 Crossing the river by finding the stones: What animates actors to engage in creating institutional change?***

Author: Maria Riegler

### **2.4.1 Introduction**

Similar to the other empirical articles in this dissertation, this article is also an empirical investigation into a collective organizing effort aimed at addressing a grand challenge. However, this article particularly aims to contribute to a better understanding of the microfoundations of institution-formation. In more concrete terms, this article builds on a single case study of a collective organizing effort started by management scholars with the goal to push towards making management research more relevant to business and society through changing the publishing and careers system in academia. In order to develop a deeper understanding of the forces animating action, I conducted in-depth interviews with 16 actors who were instrumental in getting the initiative (i.e., the collective organizing effort) starting. In what follows, I will briefly describe the research context, the theoretical background, and the article's contribution to the literature.

This article is built on a single case study of a collective organizing effort (henceforth called “the initiative”) that was started by management scholars to address the current “crisis of confidence” in management academia that has been identified by management scholars as “a response to a series of developments, including an apparent lack of practical or academic impact from most published research, a narrowing of focus in the field, increases in unethical behaviour, a downgrading of teaching and increased pressure in both publishing and teaching”

(Harley, 2019, p. 286). As I argue in the article, this crisis of confidence can be conceptualized as a grand challenge because it (1) is *complex*, containing many interlinked mechanisms such as criteria and norms for hiring, tenure, and publications as well as many different actors (scholars who may be more or less supportive of the current system, school administrators, publishers, governments etc.), (2) entails *uncertainty* about the future and (3) it is *evaluative*, meaning that the different actor groups arguably have different ideas about what the solution should be.

The article draws from the organizational-institutional literature on institutional work and institutional entrepreneurship (Battilana et al., 2009; Lawrence et al., 2009a). Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) understand institutional work as the actions taken by individuals, groups of individuals, or organizations to change their institutional environment. The extant research on institutional work and institutional entrepreneurship has shed light on enabling conditions for institutional entrepreneurship (Battilana et al., 2009), the role of sense-making and relations between actors in institutional entrepreneurship (Zilber, 2007), and emotional facilitators for the construction of new institutional logics (Fan & Zietsma, 2017). Most recently, in a conceptual article, Creed et al. (2020) suggested a framework that aims to explain why actors might engage in institutional work. They argue that an actor's "embodied world of concern", which contains the actor's "sedimented evaluations" of his/her experiences guides his/her choices to accept, resist or reject given institutional arrangements (Creed et al., 2020). According to Creed et al. (2020), the relevant forces animating action are personal and collective feelings of responsibility.

My article draws from this research on institutional work and institutional entrepreneurship and makes two contributions to the research on institutional microfoundations (Riegler, under review): Firstly, drawing from Creed et al.'s (2020) conceptual work, the article makes an analytical distinction between different kinds of action (i.e., speaking out vs. doing). Secondly,



my article contributes to the ongoing discussion about reflective vs. pre-reflective action (Cardinale, 2018). In addition to this, my article aims to contribute to the growing research stream on grand challenges by providing insights into the microfoundations underlying actors' engagement in addressing grand challenges.

#### **2.4.2 Research design**

The research objective for this article was to shed light on the microfoundations of actors' engagement in creating institutional change. More concretely, I was interested in how actors defined the problem and how they first became aware of it as well as actors' own perception and interpretation of events, of their own engagement, and of interpersonal dynamics.

Therefore, I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews with the actors that were instrumental in starting the initiative and, in addition to this, I used the data provided on the initiative's website (in particular the detailed meeting minutes that also provide insights into the individual actors' participation and degree of involvement) as well as a participant observation at one of the initiative's meetings for contextualization. In a first step, I aimed to talk to the core members of the initiative (i.e., those actors that were mentioned explicitly in the initiative's chronology on the website). I talked to the different members of the core group in order to understand nuances in their overall similar perspectives. In a second step, I also talked to peripheral members of the initiative (i.e., those actors that were signatories but seldomly participated in meetings or activities). I had the same questions for both groups of interviewees. In addition to this, I aimed for variation along nationality and gender of interviewees. I also included a snowballing question at the end of my interviews to make sure I talked to all the relevant actors. I contacted all the founding members listed on the website, however, five of them never replied and two had to cancel their scheduled interviews. Of all the 27 founding members, I interviewed 16. I also extracted the information on attendees from the meeting minutes and of the top 15

members (ranked by number of attended meetings; the person on position 15 attended 4 out of 12 meetings), I spoke to 12.

Since I was interested in the perceptions and interpretations of individuals, I began the analysis with preliminary inductive coding. In a second round, the codes were condensed and grouped into overarching themes which were created by drawing from the conceptual work by Battilana et al. (2009) and Creed et al. (2020). The validity of my data was strengthened through triangulating data from multiple sources, reflecting on rival explanations for the findings, comparing to existing theory, and building a chronology (Yin, 2013).

#### **2.4.3 Delineation of own work:**

Since I was the sole author for this article, I did everything – from the initial conceptualization to data collection and analysis to writing.

#### **2.4.4 Timeline and current status of the article**

Data was collected in late 2018 and early 2019. I presented the article at EGOS 2022 and subsequently submitted a revised version of it to Strategic Organization, where the article is currently under review.

## **3 Discussion and Conclusion**

### ***3.1 Contributions and implications***

The overarching research objective of this PhD project was to investigate the motivations and circumstances – both at an organizational and at an individual level – underlying actors’ engagement in collective organizing efforts towards addressing grand challenges. Overall, my research has been strongly phenomenon-driven – in line with the arguments for the relevance of phenomenon-based research put forward by Doh (2015) as well as Ployhart and Bartunek (2019). However, through exploring the phenomenon of collective organizing to address grand challenges, my research makes multiple contributions to the literature on grand challenges, on collective organizing, and on institutional microfoundations.

The systematic literature review allowed me to synthesize what is currently known about company engagement in creating private governance and also to identify a range of research gaps and imbalances. My empirical research aims to address some of the identified gaps and imbalances. Taken together, my empirical research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the antecedents of collective organizing efforts towards addressing grand challenges through (1) gaining a better understanding of certain contextual aspects, (2) providing more in-depth insights into relevant factors at the micro and meso level, (3) taking into account companies and industries that had been underexplored and thereby helping address the potential selection bias, and (4) discussing the normative implications of the phenomenon explored in this PhD project. The contributions will be explained in more detail below.

#### **3.1.1 Bringing systematicity to the research on company engagement in creating private governance**

The systematic literature review on the antecedents of company engagement in creating private governance (which is a subset of collective organizing efforts) connects the currently fragmented research in this field and enhances its “epistemic connectedness” (Hoyningen-

Huene, 2013, p. 120) by taking an integrative perspective and including a wide range of literature from different academic sub-fields (Riegler & Scholz, under review). Although we focus on the antecedents of company engagement in collective forms of private governance as a specific subset of collective organizing efforts, we believe that our suggested framework is relevant to the broader discourse on collective organizing towards tackling grand challenges as well as on the political responsibilities of companies.

Our systematic analysis of the literature on antecedents of company engagement in creating private governance allows us to synthesize what is currently known into a conceptual framework. We identified four different categories of drivers (i.e., internal and external motivations and pressures that lead companies to engage in the creation of private governance): Drivers associated with reputation, regulation, risk, and opportunities. We additionally identified contextual aspects (i.e., factors that can facilitate or impede company engagement in creating private governance) at the macro, meso, and micro level. This conceptual framework in itself reveals certain imbalances and gaps: As an example, we could only find two contextual aspects at the micro level and only a very small number of all articles we analyzed discussed any micro-level aspects (Riegler & Scholz, under review). This finding mirrors observations made about the lack of attention to micro-level aspects in research on political corporate social responsibility (Frynas & Stephens, 2015) as well as the more general research on corporate social responsibility (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012; Gond & Moser, 2021). Regarding contextual aspects at the meso level, we found that companies' moral orientations and values in relation to their engagement in creating private governance are underresearched (Riegler & Scholz, under review).

Additionally, our review also allows us to reflect on the theoretical underpinnings and underlying assumptions regarding companies' motivations in the extant literature and thereby call attention to potential research gaps and biases (Riegler & Scholz, under review). In

particular, we noticed that the drivers for company engagement in creating private governance that we could identify in the extant literature are in line with the theoretical assumption that companies exhibit “calculated strategic behavior” to advance their own interest, see Grabs et al., 2020. However, we find indicators that would challenge this predominant view: The extant research on company engagement in creating private governance is mainly focused on industries that had faced severe reputational threats due to scandals, accidents or other incidents, and were therefore also subject to stronger regulatory threats (i.e., the threat of new or stricter governmental regulations). Identifying reputation-protection as a main driver for company engagement in creating private governance arguably is to be expected when those cases are predominantly studied in which an industry had faced severe reputational threats prior to the creation of private governance (Riegler & Scholz, under review). We therefore suggest that a broader range of industries and cases needs to be studied to reduce potential biases.

### **3.1.2 Gaining a better understanding of company engagement in business partnerships with social and/or environmental objectives**

Our empirical study of antecedents of company engagement in business partnerships for sustainability contributes to the currently small body of research (Niesten & Jolink, 2020) on collaborative arrangements between companies with explicit social and/or environmental objectives. Partnerships between companies without social or environmental objectives (i.e., strategic alliances) as well as partnerships between companies and actors from other sectors (i.e., cross-sector partnerships) have been studied extensively (Artz & Brush, 2000; Chen et al., 2007; Clarke & Crane, 2018). While some insights from the extant literature may be transferable, partnerships between companies that focus on social and/or environmental objectives arguably differ from the aforementioned other types of partnerships to a substantial degree: they require companies to balance collaborative and competitive strategies (“co-competition”, see Christ et al., 2017; Manzhynski & Figge, 2020; Planko et al., 2019) and to share

knowledge and resources with the goal to create a positive social and/or environmental impact from which they might not (or at least not immediately) benefit economically. Building on and extending the framework proposed by Stadtler and Lin (2017), we provide qualitative in-depth insights into the antecedents of company engagement in business partnerships with social and/or environmental objectives (Riegler et al., under review).

Stadtler and Lin's (2017) framework consists of three categories: awareness (companies' general awareness of certain social and environmental issues, as well as the awareness of potential ways to address those issues), motivation (organizational drivers to seize strategic opportunities), and capability (companies' capabilities to engage in partnerships). In the awareness category, Stadtler and Lin (2017) include regulatory pressure and access to environmental networks as awareness factors. On the basis of our empirical data, we distinguish three types of awareness factors: access to environmental and social networks, regulatory pressure and perceived regulatory voids, and stakeholder pressure (Riegler et al., under review). The capability category, according to Stadtler and Lin (2017), contains companies' financial capacity and prior experience with cross-sector partnerships. Based on our data, we suggest expanding the first factor (financial capacity) and conceptualizing it as resource capacity. We also suggest a broader understanding of the partnership experience factor that is not limited to cross-sector partnerships. In the motivation category, Stadtler and Lin (201) refer to industry concentration and companies' risk-taking propensity. Based on our analysis, we suggest distinguishing industry-related motivational factors and company-related motivational factors to reflect on the different levels at which motivational factors arise (Riegler et al., under review). In addition to the existing framework, we suggest taking into account company values as well as the temporal and geographical context as potential facilitating factors. As the full paper shows, our qualitative data also allows us to elaborate on the underlying elements constituting

each of the factors and to thereby provide more fine-grained insights (Riegler et al., under review).

While our research findings are not statistically generalizable, they arguably allow for a deeper understanding the social context of company engagement in such partnerships (Jabareen, 2009). However, many questions still remain. Firstly, our data does not allow us to discern the directions of the relationships between factors (Riegler et al., under review). As an example, it remains unclear whether awareness factors (such as the access to environmental and social networks) influence motivational factors or if the relationship could also work in the opposite direction (i.e., when companies that are motivated to engage in sustainability partnerships deliberately seek out environmental and social networks). In addition to this, the underlying elements constituting each factor (i.e., employee motivation in the motivation category or knowledge capacity as part of the resource capacity in the capability category) should be investigated in even more detail. While our findings provide some insights into motivations at the individual level, many processes at the micro level as well as personal characteristics are still underexplored.

### **3.1.3 Understanding the engagement of pharmaceutical companies with COVAX and discussing their political responsibilities in times of crisis**

Our article on pharmaceutical company engagement with COVAX – a global multi-stakeholder initiative founded to ensure global equitable access to Covid-19 vaccines – provides empirical insights into motivations, facilitating, and hindering factors for companies' engagement with a multi-stakeholder initiative in an “extreme context”, i.e., the Covid-19 pandemic (Rouleau et al., 2021).

We argue that our case study can be seen as a critical test for the theory on political corporate social responsibility (PCSR) and its underlying assumptions regarding company motivations (Scholz et al., 2022/forthcoming): critics of PCSR argue that PCSR is uncertain or outright

naïve about the motivations of corporations (Rhodes & Fleming, 2020; Whelan, 2012). While proponents of PCSR acknowledge the relevance of market-based reasons for corporate engagements with social issues (Scherer et al., 2013), the normative aspect of the theory requires companies to engage “in public deliberations, collective decisions, and the provision of public goods or the restriction of public bads in cases where public authorities are unable or unwilling to fulfil this role” (Scherer et al., 2016, p. 276).

Our empirical findings for why companies have engaged with COVAX generally support the extant literature on company engagement with multi-stakeholder partnerships. The findings suggest that the engagement of pharmaceutical companies with COVAX can be largely explained by self-interest (market-based reasons and political-institutional reasons), which strengthens the position of PCSR sceptics (Scholz et al., 2022/forthcoming). As for market-based reasons facilitating company engagement with COVAX, we identified external funding by COVAX that enabled pharmaceutical companies to invest in vaccine research and development at reduced risk, the services provided by COVAX regarding allocation mechanisms and distribution infrastructure, and external stakeholder pressure (Scholz et al., 2022/forthcoming). In addition to this, we found that on the company level, reputational drivers and the desire to minimize liability may facilitate company engagement with COVAX, while a lack of experience in collaborating with multilateral organizations as well as companies’ profit inclinations, remaining liability concerns as well as the product fit may inhibit engagement with COVAX (Scholz et al., 2022/forthcoming). Regarding political-institutional reasons, we found that a lack of trust towards pharmaceutical companies within COVAX as well as the self-interested actions of countries (“vaccine nationalism”) hindered company engagement with COVAX (Scholz et al., 2022/forthcoming).

However, our findings suggest that moral considerations are also relevant to understanding companies’ engagement with COVAX, particularly when taking into account the companies’



overall strategy regarding the issue of access to medicines as well as the inclinations and convictions of individuals (Scholz et al., 2022/forthcoming): While we believe that pharmaceutical companies overall could have done more to ensure global equitable access to Covid-19 vaccines, our findings suggest that the varying degree of different companies' engagement with COVAX can in part be explained by moral considerations at the meso (company strategy) as well as the micro (individual) level.

Our findings have a range of implications for theory and practice, which I will summarize below. Regarding existing theories on companies' engagement with multi-stakeholder partnerships, our results particularly emphasize the importance of micro-level aspects in understanding the degree to which companies engaged with COVAX. Since our research focus was not primarily on micro-level aspects, our results only touch upon this important level of analysis. Further research at the micro level is needed to refine theory on why companies engage in political CSR in particular and in multi-stakeholder partnerships in general and the emerging research on micro-level CSR approaches (Acosta et al., 2019; Maak et al., 2016) provides a valuable basis. As regards PCSR theory, our findings are somewhat disconcerting: As we argue more detail in our paper (Scholz et al., 2022/forthcoming), our results suggests that companies engaged with COVAX primarily for self-interested reasons (e.g., to avoid reputational threats, in response to stakeholder pressure or because the COVAX services were seen as beneficial to the company). Additionally, we could not find strong indicators for pharmaceutical companies acting from a self-understanding as corporate citizens with the respective political responsibilities to help address grand challenges in a case "where public authorities are unable or unwilling to fulfil this role" (Scherer et al., 2016, p. 276). Thus, while we remain supportive of the normative claim behind PCSR, that companies have political responsibilities, one implication of our research seems to be that to rely on companies in times of crisis and in the face of global governance gaps would be insufficient.

### **3.1.4 Zooming in: in-depth insights into microfoundations of institutional change**

My single case study of management scholars' engagement in collective organizing towards creating institutional change within their own field provides insights into the microfoundations underlying institution-formation, a currently underexplored level of analysis (Creed et al., 2020; Haack et al., 2020). As Creed et al. (2020) argue in particular, too little is currently known about what animates individual actors to participate in creating, maintaining, and disrupting institutions. My article draws from the conceptual work by Creed et al. (2020) as well as Battilana et al. (2009) and aims to provide empirical insights into the micro-level dynamics animating actors to engage in creating institutional change through a case study of a collective organizing effort within management academia.

Firstly, rather phenomenon-oriented, this article contributes to a better understanding of what leads individual actors to engage in collective organizing efforts towards tackling grand challenges and thereby helps address the research gap identified by Howard-Grenville and Spengler (2022) regarding antecedents of efforts to address grand challenges. Secondly, this article contributes to theorizing about institutional microfoundations. Based on rich qualitative data, I identify factors that contribute to a better understanding of what animates actors to engage in institution-formation in a highly institutionalized field with established practices, routines, and role expectations (Reay et al., 2017). More concretely, I explore the actors' personal background, the change context, and the specifics of action (Riegler, under review). Regarding the actors' personal background, I discuss their personal histories, values and convictions, as well as their resources and social position. Within the change context, i.e., the context within which the actors decided to get active, my empirical data support the concept of "institutional contradictions" described by Creed et al. (2020) as well as the concept of "feeling responsible" for their profession and for younger scholars. Regarding action, I distinguish between "speaking out", and "doing something". While speaking out through talks and

publications seems to have been a course of action to which the actors were initially drawn because it appeared as self-evident to them (what Cardinale (2018) refers to as actors' "pre-reflective" engagement with structure), it took an explicit "invitation to act" to trigger the main actor's reflection about his/her own agency regarding creating institutional change through collective organizing. Through process-oriented or ethnographic research, the shift from speaking out to collective organizing can be explored in further depth in the future.

What makes the investigated case particularly interesting is that the involved actors had been aware of the problems in their field for years or even decades before they got active. I believe that understanding the dynamics at play in this specific case contributes to a better understanding of the microfoundations of collective organizing efforts in general and the insights generated through my case study are useful to understanding action (and inaction) towards addressing other grand challenges, such as climate change, as well.

### ***3.2 The larger theoretical challenges of the field***

#### **3.2.1 Grand challenges**

One of the larger theoretical challenges of the field is to understand the concept of "grand challenges" better. What exactly constitutes a grand societal challenge and what exactly may count as an effort towards tackling such a challenge arguably remains not clearly defined in the extant literature. In addition to this, it appears that the extant literature uses the concept of grand challenges both for the complex societal problems (such as climate change) and for the efforts to tackle them. There appears to be a certain risk of "grand challenges" becoming a fashionable term in management scholarship and thereby losing conceptual clarity. In a similar vein, since "tackling grand challenges" and "systemic change" are related concepts, Clarke and Crane (2018, p. 304) observe that

*"[t]he question of what exactly is meant by "systemic change" in the context of cross-sector partnerships remains somewhat unclear, and has often been left unspecified in studies that*

*invoke the term. Similarly, how (if at all) “systemic change” differs from other terms used in the literature such as “system change” (Selsky and Parker 2005), “transformative change” (Linnenluecke et al. 2017), and “institutional change” (Vurro and Dacin 2014) has yet to be established. To date, there seems to be little clarity or consistency in usage of the terms, and there appears to be little by way of common definitions across the literature.”*

Building upon their review of the literature, Clarke and Crane (2018, p. 308) offer the following definition of systemic change: “the result of actions that lead to a significant alteration within a system, potentially leading to substantial impacts. The system can be at any scale”. Systematically reviewing the literature on systemic change (including related terms such as transformational and institutional change) and connecting it to the literature on grand societal challenges (including related concepts such as wicked problems) would be a very fruitful avenue for future research. Such a review might help create terminological clarity and may also lead to a more precise definition.

### **3.2.2 Collective organizing**

Regarding collective organizing, one large theoretical challenge is that the research on this topic has emerged in multiple different fields that are still insufficiently connected (e.g., business ethics, organization studies, strategic management, economics, political sciences). One consequence of this is that scholars in different fields describe similar phenomena and identify similar concepts, but use different terms and build upon different assumptions (Lyon, 2018; Pacheco et al., 2010).

In addition to this, the different types of collective organizing (i.e., cross-sector partnerships, social movements, strategic alliances, different forms of private governance etc.) are often discussed separately, although much could be learned from comparing and contrasting the conditions under which they emerge and the motivations for actors to engage in creating them.

### **3.2.3 Future research directions**

I have already discussed some avenues for future research that are very closely linked to my own research findings. In addition to this, I would like to provide an overview of potentially promising future research directions in three categories: (1) content, (2) levels of analysis, and (3) methods.

Regarding the **content** of collective organizing towards addressing grand challenges, I see multiple ways in which research can be developed. Firstly, my own research as well as many other publications in this area primarily take an optimistic perspective regarding collective organizing as a potential force for good. However, it might be beneficial to also investigate the dark side of collective organizing, i.e., collective organizing with ill intent and – probably much more commonly – potential unintended impacts of collective organizing that may even exacerbate grand challenges. This is in line with Zürn (2012) who cautioned researchers to consider that even though collective organizing efforts may be promoted as contributing to a greater good, they do not necessarily fulfil this promise.

Secondly, the relationship between values and motivations – both at an organizational and at an individual level – as antecedents for organizational and individual actors' engagement in collective organizing should be fleshed out in future research. In our article on business partnerships for sustainability (paper 2), we included company values as a contextual factor, but arguably, an immediate link to motivational factors may exist (Riegler et al., under review). Likewise, the single case study on collective organizing within management academia (paper 4) discusses actors' values and convictions (Riegler, under review). Those values and convictions may be closely linked to the actors' feelings of responsibility (or “stewardship”) and thus, this link arguably deserves further scholarly attention.

Thirdly, the dynamics between companies, governmental actors, and civil society are complex. The discussions of “political contestations” (Bartley, 2003, 2007) or “contentious politics” (Levy et al., 2016) show how companies are led to assume responsibility for certain issues

within their sphere of influence through a complex interplay of strategies and counter-strategies. Understanding the interplay of the private, public, and civil society sector better is arguably necessary for further theorizing about political corporate social responsibility. Our case study of COVAX emphasized the complexities of commons problems at the global level in which the self-interested behavior of (high-income) countries combined with the self-interested behavior of pharmaceutical companies did not lead to the optimal allocation of Covid-19 vaccines (Scholz et al., 2022/forthcoming). Most of the extant literature on political CSR operates under the assumption of weak or absent governments. However, in the case of COVAX, governments were not only present, but actively obstructing the goal of a global equitable allocation of Covid-19 vaccines, which adds a new nuance to discussions of the political responsibilities of companies that should be explored further.

As regards **levels of analysis**, based on my research, I suggest three directions for future research. Firstly, much more research is needed at the micro level. Regarding company engagement in collective organizing efforts, decision-making processes within companies should be explored. The literature on micro-level factors in neighboring disciplines such as CSR or social issue selling suggests that companies' engagement may not necessarily be the result of purely strategic decision-making, but that the motivations and aspirations of individuals as well as micro-politics can have a substantial influence (Acosta et al., 2019; Wickert & de Bakker, 2016). As regards the factors animating action at the individual level, more in-depth empirical investigations are still needed. Ethnographic or process research may help solve remaining puzzles about what exactly animates actors to start organizing towards addressing grand challenges. Related to this, as Creed et al. (2020) observe, most of the extant literature regarding actors' engagement in creating, changing or disrupting institutions focuses on the cognitive dimension of action, while the affective dimension is currently underexplored. A

greater emphasis on the affective dimension underlying action in relation to collective organizing may help understand the individual-level factors better.

Secondly, at the meso level (i.e., the organizational level), future research on collaborative forms of collective organizing (i.e., cross-sector partnerships and strategic environmental/social alliances) may investigate differences related to company size. On the one hand, small and medium-sized enterprises have faced much less regulatory pressures regarding their social and environmental performance, but on the other hand, such companies may have stronger ties to their communities and more informal ways to engage in collaborations. Likewise, smaller companies are expected to have fewer slack resources that may be necessary for their engagement in collective organizing, but on the other hand, some forms of collective organizing may even help them share resources and build up capabilities in exchange with other organizations (Riegler et al., under review). In addition to this, the role of companies' overall strategies and moral orientations in relation to their engagement with social and/or environmental issues came up multiple times in our research (Riegler et al., under review; Riegler & Scholz, under review; Scholz et al., 2022/forthcoming). I would therefore like to echo de Bakker et al.'s (2019) call for researchers to explore the differences in companies' actions based on their moral orientations.

Thirdly, while my own PhD project was focused on understanding the antecedents of collective organizing, future research also needs to investigate the processes following those collective organizing efforts and the mechanisms leading to substantial changes at the level of organizational fields (a level of analysis often used in organizational institutionalism, situated between the organizational and the societal level). Ferraro et al. (2015, p. 364) have emphasized the need to "deepen our understanding of the connections between organizational action and field-level changes". Multi-level research may help understand the relationship between micro-

level and meso-level factors and actions on the one hand and changes in social structures on the other hand.

Finally, and briefly, I would like to suggest future research avenues focused on **methods**. Firstly, regarding the antecedents of both collaborative and coordinative forms of collective organizing efforts towards addressing grand challenges, qualitative comparative analysis might be useful to identify relevant configurations of factors. Secondly, quantitative research can help understand the direction of relationships between factors as well as effect sizes and can also discern moderating and mediating factors. Thirdly, regarding research on micro-level dynamics underlying collective organizing efforts (particularly regarding the intentions, motivations, and affective factors at the individual level as well as dynamics at the interpersonal level), ethnographic and process-based methods of data collection and analysis would arguably provide the necessary level of detail.

### **3.2.4 Conclusion**

The overarching research objective of this PhD project was to investigate the motivations and circumstances – both at an organizational and at an individual level – underlying actors' engagement in collective organizing efforts towards addressing grand challenges. Through four different articles – a systematic literature review and three qualitative empirical inquiries – this PhD project contributes to closing the current research gap regarding antecedents of coordination and collaboration efforts to address grand challenges that was also identified by Howard-Grenville & Spengler (2022).

In conclusion, much of the research in this PhD project highlights the prevalence of companies' self-interest in their engagement with collective organizing efforts. However, taking a closer look reveals many theoretical puzzles. As an example, while we identified motivation factors associated with self-interest in our investigation of business partnerships for sustainability, we also found that some managers were mainly impact-oriented, i.e., they were predominantly



focused on creating a greater (positive) impact on the specific social or environmental problem they were facing and therefore viewed partnering with other companies as the most effective strategy. Similarly intriguing, in the case study of a collective organizing effort within academia, the key actors had become successful under the norms they were later trying to change, and they had been aware of the problems in their field for years or even decades before they got active. I believe that understanding the dynamics at play in this specific case contributes to a better understanding of the microfoundations of collective organizing efforts in general and the insights generated through my case study are useful to understanding action (and inaction) towards addressing other grand challenges, such as climate change, as well.

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## **5 Appendix: Articles included in this PhD thesis**

### ***5.1 Appendix 1: The antecedents of company engagement in the creation of private governance: A systematic literature review and research agenda***

Authors: Maria Riegler, Markus Scholz

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**Abstract:** This article reviews the literature on antecedents (i.e., drivers and contextual aspects) of company engagement in the *creation* of collective forms of private governance. Research on this phenomenon is currently highly fragmented into numerous academic fields and sub-fields. The resulting heterogeneity in theoretical underpinnings, research approaches, and concepts makes it difficult to grasp what is known about the phenomenon. This cross-disciplinary review provides management scholars with an accessible overview, points the way towards a comprehensive, discipline-spanning perspective on the drivers and contextual aspects of company engagement in creating private governance, and advances the understanding of the mechanisms by suggesting a preliminary framework. Based on our analysis, we argue that the current research is one-sided regarding case selections as well as the level of analysis. This research bias gives upwind to the dominant interpretation that companies primarily engage in the creation of private governance for instrumental reasons. We make suggestions for a future research agenda that has the capacity to challenge this dominant interpretative view and thereby provide room for broader theory building.

**Keywords:** nonmarket strategy, political corporate social responsibility, private governance, private regulation, standard-setting

## **INTRODUCTION**

Business and society regularly face so-called governance gaps, i.e., the lack of effective rules and enforcement mechanisms to regulate business behavior (Crane *et al.* 2019; Eberlein 2019). One problem resulting from these governance gaps is the failure of governmental bodies to address the so-called grand challenges the world faces – among them environmental problems (Ferraro *et al.* 2015), climate change (Schüssler *et al.* 2014), or pandemics (Howard-Grenville, 2021). In this context, companies increasingly have become political actors and started co-creating their own “rules of the game” that may help to close the governance gaps (de Bakker *et al.* 2019; Kourula *et al.* 2019; Scherer and Palazzo 2011). Many different labels have been used for this phenomenon, e.g., civil regulation (Vogel 2010; Bowman and Hodge 2009), industry self-regulation (Dashwood 2014; Barnett and King 2008), or transnational business governance (e.g., Eberlein *et al.* 2014). In this article, we will use the arguably most widely accepted term for this phenomenon, i.e., “private governance” (e.g., Reinecke and Donaghey 2021).

Although research on private governance is booming (Grabs *et al.* 2020; de Bakker *et al.* 2019, cf. Figure 1), we are currently lacking a review of the scholarly knowledge regarding one of the most fundamental questions in the domain, i.e. *why and under what circumstances do companies engage in the creation of private governance?*

We aim to close this research gap by means of this review. More specifically, we are interested in arrangements in which companies “are directly involved in regulating” (Pattberg 2006, p. 591) by *collectively* creating principles-based or certification-based standards for business conduct in the context of markets and their interfaces with external parties, including the natural environment (see also Kourula *et al.* 2019). We thereby exclude firm-level codes of conduct, which belong to the broader private governance debate. Our focus is based on the assumption that collective private governance is more likely than firm-level codes of conduct to target governance gaps and thus to address the grand challenges. In the remainder of this

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article, we will use the term “private governance” to refer to the collective forms of private governance. As indicated, we focus on the role of companies in the *creation* of private governance as opposed to the adoption of existing non-state regulations. Multiple theoretical and practical reasons necessitate this investigation of why and under what circumstances companies engage in the *creation* of private governance:

In practice, we see many private governance initiatives, but their exact nature and especially their creation remain poorly understood. If private governance should become a more solid part of the governance mix to tackle grand challenges, researchers, managers, and lawmakers need to understand better what factors drive companies to step up and help close governance gaps by creating private governance (Zeyen *et al.* 2016). The epistemological need for a review on the antecedents of company engagement in the creation of private governance results from a rapidly growing number of research publications we have witnessed in the last two decades (Grabs *et al.* 2020; de Bakker *et al.* 2019). The “boom” of publications in diverse and often insufficiently connected research disciplines (e.g., business ethics, management research, political science) led to a stark fragmentation of the field. Recently, de Bakker *et al.* (2019) provided a literature review on multi-stakeholder initiatives in which they also briefly discuss why companies adopt existing standards. However, a systematic review of the literature of why companies become first movers, i.e., why they would engage in *creating* private governance, is still missing.

In addition to this, the lack of systematicity creates a substantial problem for theory development. Without a systematic review of the literature, it is difficult to determine the next steps on the research agenda and it is therefore difficult for the field to advance. Currently, scholars lack systematic indicators regarding dominant as well as neglected theoretical assumptions, imbalances and research gaps.

We aim to make three main contributions to management practice and scholarship in general, as well as to the research on private governance, in particular.

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Firstly, we provide the first systematic review of the literature on the antecedents of company engagement in creating private governance, assuming an integrative perspective and taking into account a wide range of literature from different academic fields. We provide systematicity to this burgeoning field by identifying, analyzing and structuring the antecedents, thereby paving the way for more and better informed empirical research.

Secondly, we make a theoretical contribution by proposing a conceptual framework of the antecedents of company engagement in the creation of private governance. This framework, as a synthesis of the literature, provides the core mechanisms underlying company engagement in the creation of private governance and, in that respect, helps further our understanding of how this phenomenon emerges.

Thirdly, by reflecting on the theoretical underpinnings of the extant research, our review allows for identifying research biases and gaps that lead to a dominant understanding of the creation of private governance as being overwhelmingly linked to self-interested motives. In this context, we will argue that the current research is one-sided with regard to case selections as well as the level of analysis and therefore leaves too little room for alternative or complementing theoretical interpretations. We make suggestions for a future research agenda that has the capacity to challenge the dominant interpretative view and thereby open the room for broader theory building.

This article is structured as follows: after a description of our research methodology, we give a brief overview of the characteristics of the reviewed papers. Next, we present our findings. The article concludes with a discussion of these findings and extensive suggestions for further research.

## **METHODOLOGY**

By means of this review, we aim to categorize and evaluate the drivers and contextual aspects underlying companies' engagement in the *creation* of private governance as discussed in the extant literature. We adopted the approach as described by Denyer and Tranfield (2009).

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The Web of Science Core Collection (WOS) and Scopus were used as databases for the literature search. After a preliminary review of the literature (manual searches in the databases as well as on Google Scholar and a screening of relevant articles' bibliographies), we created a broad search string by defining the scope of the study and finding synonyms for the relevant terms. The full search string is provided in the appendix. Due to the broadness of the search terms used, the search yielded a large number of results that had to be reduced to a selection of relevant documents.

The number of results prior to any refinements was 11,680. Initial refinements included setting English as a document language; excluding document types other than peer-reviewed journal articles; restricting the date range from 1995 to end of July 2021 and limiting the search results to the following disciplines: business, environmental studies, ethics, international relations, law, management, economics, political science, public administration, social sciences interdisciplinary, social sciences general, and sociology. After removal of duplicates, 4,188 results remained.

The broad search strategy made manual relevance screening necessary. The titles and abstracts of the remaining 4,188 articles were screened to exclude articles that were not relevant (i.e., clearly not discussing firm engagement in creating private governance). Articles were excluded during the manual relevance screening for the following reasons: erroneous database entries, publications from unrelated disciplines, and irrelevant research question. The 537 articles passing the first screening had to meet several criteria to be included in the final set of articles:

- collective action: the paper describes one or several initiatives that were created in a joint effort by multiple actors (i.e., at least one company in collaboration with one or more stakeholders)

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- private governance: the paper describes one or more initiatives for private governance (i.e., rules, regulations, guidelines, codes or standards that regulate business conduct in the context of the operation of markets based on social, environmental or ethical goals)
- business focus: articles describe initiatives that were solely or at least partly driven by business actors
- focus on antecedents: the article discusses the antecedents of company engagement in the creation of collective forms of private governance in detail, as opposed to mentioning them merely in passing or briefly summarizing existing research on this topic. In order to distinguish between relevant articles and irrelevant articles, the authors read all articles. When all authors agreed that the article was relevant, it was included in the review. When assessments differed among the authors, the articles in question were discussed until a consensus could be reached (see de Bakker *et al.* (2019) for a similar approach).

After this screening process, the final selection of 97 papers remained, which were then evaluated and coded using Atlas.ti. In the qualitative content analysis of the literature, a combination of top-down and bottom-up coding was applied (Finfgeld-Connett 2014; Evans and FitzGerald 2002). Based on a preliminary reading of relevant articles, we deductively created an initial coding frame, differentiating between drivers and contextual aspects. This coding frame was inductively refined by adding subcategories based on a preliminary inductive coding of a subset of the papers. In a next step, all remaining articles were coded in accordance with the code list. Codes were changed or added when necessary.

The data generated in this process was then compared to find contrasts and similarities, and subsequently synthesized into overarching categories. Apart from the categories, we identified a relevant distinction between ex-ante (key actors deciding on their own that something needs to be done) and ex-post (key actors merely reacting to external pressure and threats). This distinction was noted whenever the articles provided enough information to



distinguish between the two instances. In addition, the contextual aspects were analytically grouped into macro, meso, and micro levels.

## **AN OVERVIEW OF ARTICLE CHARACTERISTICS**

In this section, we provide a short overview of the articles that are analyzed in this systematic review. As Figure 1 shows, scholarly interest in the antecedents of company engagement in the creation of private governance has substantially increased since around 2005.

--- Figure 1 about here ---

The number of empirical articles (n=55) slightly exceeded the number of conceptual articles (n=42) on antecedents of company engagement in the creation of private governance. In addition, of those empirical articles, only six employ quantitative methods. A large number of articles included in this review do not focus on a specific industry, either because the articles focus on cross-industry private governance efforts or because the articles discuss private governance in an abstract manner. Among the articles that do focus on a particular industry, the chemical, finance, food, forestry, and textile industry are discussed most frequently. As for the concrete private governance initiatives examined, the majority of articles does not specify any particular initiative, but the emergence of the chemical industry's Responsible Care Initiative and the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) are most commonly discussed. Most articles discuss private governance at a more general, abstract level or employ hypothetical examples. Others discuss and compare several private governance initiatives at once, sometimes at the expense of more in-depth examinations.

--- Figure 2 about here ---

The range of journals covered in the final selection of articles highlights the interdisciplinary perspective of this review. Table I connects the articles reviewed with the categories used in the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI), the Science Citation Index Expanded (SCIE), and the Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI). According to this

categorization, the majority of articles were published in business ethics journals, followed by political science, business, management, and environmental studies.

--- Table I about here ---

## **RESULTS: ANTECEDENTS OF COMPANY ENGAGEMENT IN THE CREATION OF PRIVATE GOVERNANCE**

In this section, we will present *drivers* as well as relevant *contextual aspects* of company engagement in the creation of private governance as identified in the literature. For the purpose of this review, we understand *drivers* as both internal and external motivations and pressures that lead companies to engage in the creation of private governance. *Contextual aspects* are understood as factors that can either facilitate or impede company engagement in the creation of private governance.

Based on this categorization, we propose a preliminary multi-level framework (see Figure 3). In this framework, we synthesize what is currently known about the circumstances and mechanisms leading up to company engagement in the creation of private governance, therein helping to further the understanding of how private governance emerges (for a similar approach, see Hanelt *et al.* 2020). In addition, this framework is meant to spark discussions on company engagement in the creation of private governance within management practice and scholarship.

--- Figure 3 about here ---

### **Drivers for company engagement in the creation of private governance**

In what follows, we will introduce the four different categories of drivers, i.e., drivers associated with *reputation*, *regulation*, *risk*, and *opportunity*, followed by three categories of contextual factors, i.e., contextual aspects at the *macro*, *meso*, and *micro* level that are relevant to company engagement in the creation of private governance. To organize the literature further, we make an analytical distinction between ex-post and ex-ante whenever applicable.

#### ***Reputation-associated drivers***

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As discussed extensively in the literature on antecedents of company engagement in the creation of private governance, efforts to build up reputation or to protect an established reputation are crucial factors behind engagement in creating private governance (e.g. Glasbergen 2013; King and Lenox 2000; Labatt and Maclaren 1998), which is mentioned in 81 of the 97 articles analyzed in our review.

The extant literature discusses individual companies' reputations, entire industries' reputations and the relationship between those two. As King and Lenox (2000) point out, a company's reputation is also affected by the reputation of the industry in which it operates. As a consequence, one low performer in the industry causing a high-profile scandal can taint the entire industry's reputation. At the industry level, it therefore constitutes a rational gesture to collaborate in an effort to protect the industry's reputation (Chrun *et al.* 2016; Abbot 2012; Barnett and King 2008). We call the ex-post variant of reputational drivers *reputation protection*. As described in the literature, firms often try to protect their reputation by engaging in the creation of private governance after a reputational threat has materialized. To exemplify the different forms of drivers and in so doing make our research accessible to management scholarship, we will now proceed to explain the possible manifestations of reputational threats in some detail.

(1) *Scandals* or *accidents* become concrete reputational threats when they enter into the awareness of relevant stakeholders (e.g., civil society, organizations, investors) or the general public (Baumann-Pauly *et al.* 2017; de los Reyes *et al.* 2017; Bartley 2007). One prominent example is the Rana Plaza disaster in Bangladesh in 2013 which raised global public awareness about unsafe labor conditions in the textile industry and led to the creation of two private governance initiatives: the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh and the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety (Donaghey and Reinecke 2018; Baumann-Pauly *et al.* 2017; Reinecke and Donaghey 2015).

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(2) *Investigative media reports* about social, environmental, or ethical problems caused by corporations are another source of reputational threats (Barclay and Miller 2018; Bartley 2007). Media reports on potentially harmful effects of certain chemicals used in consumer products such as toothpaste, textiles, or plastic bottles are some examples provided in the literature (Kraft and Raz 2017). Prior to the emergence of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), media coverage on deforestation increased public awareness of the problems associated with tropical timber and illegal logging (Chan and Pattberg 2008).

(3) *Campaigns by civil society organizations (CSOs)* have the potential to create a significant reputational threat towards individual companies or entire industries (Conley and Williams 2011; Héritier and Eckert 2009; Bartley 2007, 2003). The literature frequently discusses the tactic employed by many civil society organizations of setting up “naming and shaming” campaigns. These tactics usually entail identifying the most vulnerable businesses within the target industry, i.e., the companies that have a reputation to lose, and pressuring them with targeted campaigns (Reinecke and Donaghey 2015; Delmas and Montes-Sancho 2010; Vogel 2010). For example, CSOs started targeted campaigning on overfishing in the 2000s, which became a major driver for companies to engage in creating private fishery governance (Barclay and Miller, 2018).

(4) *“Rival” standards* that were created by civil society organizations (CSOs) are the fourth source of reputational threats we have identified in the literature. Private regulatory instruments sponsored by CSOs are often stricter than many companies would like them to be (Auld *et al.* 2008). As a result, adopting CSO standards is frequently not an option for companies. However, CSO standards hold the potential to raise public awareness about problems in a particular industry and to even serve as a benchmark for an industry’s social or environmental performance. A common industry response to the creation of a CSO standard is the creation of an industry-sponsored standard that addresses the same issues, but, often exhibits weaker or inadequate monitoring and enforcement mechanisms. An

example discussed in the literature is the business-led Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety that was established just weeks after the multi-stakeholder-governed Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety (Donaghey and Reinecke 2018; Reinecke and Donaghey 2015).

In this article, we call the ex-ante variant of reputational drivers *reputation building*. Even in the absence of concrete reputational threats, businesses might be motivated to engage in creating private governance because (1) they anticipate potential future reputational problems, (2) they see the opportunity to differentiate themselves from competitors, or (3) particularly in the case of new and emerging industries, companies may wish to secure public trust towards the industry from the very outset.

(1) Companies might engage in creating private governance ex ante because they *anticipate potential future reputational problems* should they fail to take care of certain issues within their industry (Donaldson and Schoemaker 2013; Héritier and Eckert 2009; Arya and Salk 2006). This anticipatory action can be seen as long-term reputational risk management (Zeyen *et al.* 2016; Haufler 2001). Zeyen *et al.* (2016), for example, argue that some of the founding members of the FSC were “public relations sensitive” companies that wanted to protect themselves against potential future reputational risk.

(2) The opportunity to *differentiate themselves from competitors* is attractive to some companies (Schneiker and Joachim 2017; Chrun *et al.* 2016; Fagotto 2014). One example frequently discussed in the literature is (again) the FSC. That is, companies that engaged in the creation of the initiative were promised a “boycott shield” by civil society organizations, and businesses simultaneously hoped to be able to build up their reputation as environmentally responsible stewards and, subsequently, to market their products to environmentally-oriented consumers (Auld *et al.* 2009).

(3) Some companies engage in creating private governance to minimize the industry’s risks ex ante and *thereby increase public confidence in the industry* (Bowman and Hodge 2009;

Dyke *et al.* 2005; Khanna 2001). This is particularly important for companies in new and emerging industries, such as the nanotechnology industry (Abbot 2012; Bowman and Hodge 2009). As an example, Bowman and Hodge (2009) argue that one of the drivers behind the development of private governance in the nanotechnology industry is the goal of gaining citizen trust.

### ***Regulation-associated drivers***

As discussed extensively in the literature, companies may decide to engage in creating private governance for reasons associated with regulation. Indeed, 78 out of the 97 articles analyzed discuss regulation-associated drivers for company engagement in creating private governance. In this review article, we use the term “regulation” to refer to hard laws created and enforced by governmental organizations.

We refer to the ex-post variant of regulation-associated drivers as *evading regulation*. Companies often engage in creating private governance as a response to a credible regulatory threat, which is also called “the shadow of hierarchy” or being “a step ahead of the sheriff” in the literature (Héritier and Eckert 2008; Bomsel *et al.* 1996). A regulatory threat manifests when political debates emerge about the necessity of new governmental regulations for resolving a certain issue. The threat becomes imminent when new regulations are drafted and discussed by legislative bodies (Héritier and Eckert 2009). The boundary between ex-ante and ex-post private governance in the context of regulation-associated drivers is defined by the extent to which the companies in question perceive a credible regulatory threat.

The majority of the articles discussing regulation-associated drivers argue that companies engage in creating private governance to establish “soft laws” in an effort to preempt the introduction of governmental “hard laws.” This motivation is often explained in the literature by the higher compliance cost for companies associated with hard laws in contrast to soft laws (Auld and Cashore 2013; Delmas and Montes-Sancho 2010; Bomsel *et al.* 1996). An example analyzed in the literature includes the German paper industry that created a new environmental

standard after the lawmakers had already started discussing a regulatory draft (Héritier and Eckert 2009).

We call the ex-ante variant of regulation-associated drivers *closing governance gaps*. In some cases, companies might engage in creating private governance in the absence of an explicit or implicit regulatory threat. Possible reasons, as indicated in the literature, for companies filling in those gaps in governance ex-ante include (1) reducing regulatory uncertainty, (2) the opportunity to influence future regulations, and (3) the realization that existing regulations are insufficient for protecting the industry from itself.

(1) *Regulatory uncertainty* can be harmful for companies. For that reason, in some cases, creating private governance to regulate business activity for the entire industry – at a domestic or even global level – might be more attractive to companies than regulatory uncertainty. An example discussed in the literature is the formation of the International Council on Mining and Minerals, where major mining companies addressed the regulatory uncertainty resulting from the global regulatory patchwork by creating stricter standards globally (Dashwood 2014).

(2) In some instances, companies anticipate the potential need for future regulations and engage in creating private governance in the hopes of *influencing the nature of future regulations* regarding a particular issue. If regulators design new laws based on voluntary standards that already exist, companies that engage in the creation of such standards have the opportunity to influence the specifics of the design of the future regulations for their own benefit (Zeyen *et al.* 2016; Dashwood 2014; Khanna 2001). As an example, standards for the nanotechnology industry established by the International Standardization Organization (ISO) have influenced nation-level regulations for nanotechnology (Abbot 2012).

(3) As discussed in the literature, in some cases, the decision by companies to engage in creating private governance might be preceded by the *realization that the existing regulatory framework is not sufficient* to protect the industry from systemic risks emanating from the

industry itself (Fagotto 2014; Acutt *et al.* 2004; Labatt and Maclaren 1998). An example is the creation of the “Climate Wise” principles in the private insurance industry as an effort to collectively overcome the political obstacles related to pricing and mitigating climate change risks (Thistlethwaite 2012).

### ***Risk-associated drivers***

The third main category of drivers that we want to introduce is associated with companies’ desire to reduce risk. 33 out of 97 articles discuss risk-associated drivers for company engagement in creating private governance.

Risk-associated drivers for company engagement in creating private governance discussed in the literature range from business risks that can hamper an individual company’s business activity to systemic risks that can potentially damage an entire industry and negatively impact society as a whole. Some risks materializing at one individual company also have the potential to “spill over” to the company’s competitors. The following types of risk are discussed in the existing literature as potential drivers for company engagement in creating private governance: (1) systemic risk, (2) resource scarcity, (3) supply chain risks, and (4) legal risks.

(1) *Systemic risk*: Risks are systemic if they have the potential to disrupt a whole industry and, as a consequence, affect the economic system in general or even society as a whole (Donaldson and Schoemaker 2013). Some authors state that companies engage in creating private governance in order to minimize systemic risk, while some even prescriptively argue that companies should do so in their own self-interest (Donaldson and Schoemaker 2013; Thistlethwaite 2012). An example where companies have reacted to systemic risk by creating private governance is the chemical industry’s Responsible Care program (Barnett and King 2008).

(2) *Resource scarcity*: Some business actors may engage in creating private governance in an effort to reduce the risk of future resource scarcity, i.e., to ensure that resources relevant to their business activities remain available in sufficient quantities and qualities in the future



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(Ruysschaert *et al.* 2019; e.g., Elbra 2014; Glasbergen 2013). To provide an example, Glasbergen (2013) argues that Unilever's main motive in engaging in the creation of the Roundtable for Sustainable Palm Oil was to ensure the long-term availability of palm oil.

(3) *Supply chain risks*: As stated in the literature, some companies – particularly importers and retailers – might engage in creating private governance to minimize supply chain risks (Esbjerg 2020; Bowen *et al.* 2018; Knudsen 2013). As an example, Auld *et al.* (2009) argue that importers engaged in the creation of the Marine Aquarium Council because they wanted to ensure that their suppliers' products met a certain quality standard.

(4) *Legal risks*: According to some authors, companies might engage in creating private governance in order to protect themselves against potential future lawsuits or to standardize questions of legal liability (Esbjerg 2020; Berkowitz *et al.* 2017). In contrast to the regulatory threats discussed before, the concept of legal risks does not refer to the creation of new laws, but to the risk of stakeholders filing a lawsuit against a company. As an example, Amekawa (2009) argues that companies have engaged in creating the agricultural standard GlobalGAP to set minimum quality standards for their industry in order to avoid litigation.

***Opportunity-associated drivers***

Some authors argue that the objective of seizing business opportunities might also serve as a driver for companies to engage in the creation of private governance. We therefore introduce the category of *opportunity-associated drivers*. 43 out of the 97 papers included in this review discussed at least one opportunity-associated driver for company engagement in the creation of private governance. Hahn and Pinkse (2014) argue that to one single firm, the collective benefits are positive externalities (and therefore not relevant to the individual firm's decision). Alternatively, as Lenox (2006) argues, based on Olson (2002/1965), an individual firm might nevertheless take its own respective share of the industry-wide collective benefit of private governance into account.

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(1) *Financial benefits*: According to some authors, companies have an incentive to engage in creating private governance when they expect a clear financial benefit from it (Bakan 2015; Amekawa 2009; Lyon and Maxwell 2003). Those financial benefits can occur in the form of increased profits, efficiency gains and cost reductions. As an example, a new environmental standard that is aimed at reducing pollution might inspire companies to use their resources more efficiently and thereby result in cost savings, as previous empirical work on the Responsible Care initiative has suggested (Lenox 2006).

(2) *Early-mover advantages*: A related, but more specific, type of benefit that is frequently discussed in the literature is that of early-mover advantages (Dashwood 2014; Bowman and Hodge 2009). Examples indicate that private governance created by a subset of companies within an industry can become a de facto standard that the entire industry is ultimately measured against. It follows then, that companies which engage in creating private governance, as early movers, can expect to extract a competitive advantage over the late adopters among their competitors (Dashwood 2014; Giuliano and Linder 2013; Labatt and Maclaren 1998). One example discussed in the literature is the creation of the International Council on Mining and Metal's principles: the actors spearheading the creation of the principles were convinced that they would benefit from being "ahead of the group" (Dashwood 2014, p. 564).

(3) *Improvements in a company's management*: The guidelines provided through private governance can serve as an orientation for the improvement of a company's management, e.g., with regards to a systematized approach towards quality management (Knudsen 2013; Hassel 2008; Acutt *et al.* 2004). Engagement in the creation of private governance might also help companies improve the way they manage their supply chains (Hassel 2008). As an example, Conley and Williams (2011) suggest that the banks that were engaged in the creation of the Equator Principles appreciate that these principles can be used as management

tools in understanding and addressing regulatory differences among countries as well as for standardizing their lending practices.

(4) *Knowledge-sharing*: Engagement in the creation of private governance might also provide company representatives with the opportunity to exchange knowledge with competitors and third parties. To that extent, thus, engagement in the creation of private governance might facilitate organizational learning processes (Vogel 2010; Barnett and King 2008; Haufler 2001). To provide an example, the chemical industry's Responsible Care program, besides regulating business conduct in the chemical industry, provided an additional forum for learning from best practices and for mutual assistance (Barnett and King 2008).

(5) *Potential innovations*: Related to the previous category of mutual learning and knowledge-sharing, some authors argue that private governance might even inspire innovation (Bowman and Hodge 2009; Pelozo and Falkenberg 2009; Labatt and Maclaren 1998). To provide an example, de Loe et al. (2016) argue that companies' engagement in the creation of private governance leads to the development of more creative, cost-effective solutions. Similarly, Pelozo and Falkenberg (2009), referring to data suggesting that company engagement with Responsible Care is associated with a higher number of patents held by the company, argue that company engagement in private governance can hold the potential for increased innovation within a company as the shared knowledge among members can lead to innovative ideas and practices. The expectation of this kind of benefit may thus drive companies to engage in the creation of private governance.

Opportunity-associated drivers logically cannot work *ex-post*. This would require a company to engage in creating private governance *after* the benefits from the given private governance effort have already materialized. Accordingly, the distinction between *ex-ante* and *ex-post* is omitted in this section.

## **Contextual aspects**

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To provide a more comprehensive conceptualization of the mechanisms behind company engagement in the creation of private governance and with the aim of working towards a framework that helps foster the understanding of the phenomenon, we have analyzed and structured the contextual aspects that are suggested in the existing literature. In contrast to the drivers introduced above, the literature understands contextual aspects as factors that are no direct reasons for companies to engage in the creation of private governance, but rather facilitate or impede companies' tendencies to do so.

Our framework identifies contextual aspects – as derived from the existing literature (see our discussion section) – that have the capacity to either facilitate (+) or to impede (-) company engagement in the creation of private governance. We have included these aspects in our preliminary framework and introduce them as the *macro, meso* and *micro dimensions of contextual aspects*. The following table summarizes the contextual aspects.

--- Table II about here ---

***Macro-level contextual aspects***

The *macro level* of contextual aspects contains political, economic, institutional, and societal factors that have the capacity to influence the creation of private governance. Out of the 97 articles analyzed in this review, 50 discuss at least one macro-level aspect.

*Changing societal expectations of firms:* Expectations as to how companies should behave have changed in the past two decades, particularly in the global West (Bernstein and Cashore 2007). This shift has influenced company strategies and management values. As an example, Mena and Suddaby (2016) argue that in the global apparel industry, multinationals were rather abruptly expected to assume responsibility for their entire supply chain, and that this responsibility is now widely taken for granted. In a similar vein, Thorne and Quinn (2016) point out that information availability and heightened awareness have raised expectations regarding transparency and responsible business conduct.. Companies failing to do so might otherwise face reputational threats (Dashwood 2014; Misani 2010; King and Lenox 2000).

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Against the backdrop of this literature, it can be expected that increased societal expectations towards company conduct (e.g., with regard to companies assuming responsibility for the environmental and social impacts of their activities) have the capacity to positively influence company engagement in the creation of private governance.

*Political contestations among states, industry actors, and civil society organizations:* According to a set of authors (Levy *et al.* 2016; Bartley 2007; Campbell 2007), private governance emerges from ongoing political contestations involving various groups of societal actors, including states, industry actors, and civil society organizations. The norms that emerge might not be optimal for a single actor group, but instead represent the results of strategies and counterstrategies by different actor groups (Bartley 2007). As suggested in the extant literature, the existence and intensity of such political contestations have a positive influence on company engagement in the creation of private governance (Donaghey *et al.* 2014; Auld *et al.* 2008; Bartley 2007).

*Increased confidence in market-based solutions:* Increased confidence in private governance on the part of governmental actors, civil society organizations, and industry actors could be witnessed in the past few decades. As an example, Bartley (2003) points out that the dominating “institutions of globalization” – characterized by free trade rules and weakened roles of nation states – have led both states and civil society organizations to turn towards non-state solutions. Thus, according to the extant literature, increased confidence in market-based solutions facilitates company engagement in the creation of private governance (Mena and Suddaby 2016; Chan and Pattberg 2008; Bernstein and Cashore 2007).

*Institutional differences across nations:* Several authors (Reinecke and Donaghey 2015; Chan and Pattberg 2008; Arya and Salk 2006) have proposed the idea that institutional arrangements at the national level influence the way corporate responsibility is defined and implemented by companies in a given country. As an example, Conley and Williams (2011) point out that reputational risk from activism by civil society organizations is higher in Europe

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and the United States due to the regions' history of institutional interactions. The literature thus suggests that companies based in countries with stronger institutions that promote corporate responsibility (e.g., legal regulations, environmental and social sensitivity among consumers, societal expectations in company conduct) are more likely to engage in creating private governance (Chan and Pattberg, 2008; Conley and Williams, 2011).

*Competition law:* Competition laws such as the European Union competition law and the United States antitrust law largely prohibit agreements among competitors (Vandenbergh 2013; Arya and Salk 2006). In particular, it is often illegal for industry associations to monitor and sanction member companies' conduct (Barnett and King 2008; Wotruba 1997). Thus, the extant literature suggests that regulations targeting anti-competitive conduct by companies have the capacity to hinder company engagement in creating private governance, particularly in the form of intra-industry standards (Vandenbergh 2013; Arya and Salk 2006).

***Meso-level contextual aspects***

In our analysis, the *meso level* comprises contextual aspects at the level of firms, private governance initiatives, and industries as a whole. Of the total of 97 papers that we analyzed on the subject of company engagement in the creation of private governance, 78 discussed at least one meso-level factor.

*Firm characteristics:* At the company level, certain firm characteristics have a substantial influence on an individual company's decision to engage in creating private governance. Among those characteristics are the company's financial resources, size, visibility to the public, initial social and environmental performance, and values. Since engaging in the creation of private governance is resource-intensive, the extant literature suggests that firms with ample resources are more likely to engage in the creation of private governance (Wuisan *et al.* 2012; Bernstein and Cashore 2007; Campbell 2007). Similarly, larger corporations can generally more easily afford to engage in private governance (Dashwood 2014; Fagotto 2014; Balzarova and Castka 2012). Companies with high public visibility are usually under higher reputational

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pressure (Conley and Williams 2011; Amekawa 2009; Bernstein and Cashore 2007), which amplifies the reputation-associated drivers discussed above. Some authors (Prakash and Potoski 2007; King and Lenox 2000) suggest that firms with a lower social and/or environmental performance may be more likely to engage in the creation of private governance as they benefit most from it (e.g., through reputational gains); others, however, argue that those companies that already are industry leaders regarding corporate responsibility may be more inclined to engage in the creation of private governance because they intend to defend their position (Knudsen 2013; Wright 2012; Misani 2010).

*Existing networks:* The extant literature indicates that pre-existing industry associations, platforms, or personal relationships among relevant actors can facilitate the coordination of private governance efforts and thereby make company engagement in the creation of private governance more likely (Cid Aguayo and Barriga 2016; Gond and Piani 2013; Delmas and Montes-Sancho 2010).

*Predecessors in other industries or countries:* As suggested by some authors, positive experiences with private governance initiatives in other sectors or countries can strengthen the confidence of participants in their own private governance efforts, thereby increasing the likelihood of company engagement in the creation of private governance (Cid Aguayo and Barriga 2016; Garcia Martinez *et al.* 2013; Gulbrandsen 2008).

*Frequent informal contact with stakeholders:* Various authors suggest that frequent informal contact with representatives of other companies and civil society organizations possibly facilitates the exchange of relevant knowledge and the development of trust as well as a shared understanding among various actors, which has the capacity to promote company engagement in the creation of private governance (Schneiker and Joachim 2017; Gulbrandsen 2008; Backhouse *et al.* 2006).

*Presence of lead actors:* According to the existing literature, lead actors – both in the form of dedicated and influential individuals and in the form of pioneer companies, play a

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relevant role in the creation of private governance (Dashwood 2014; Gond and Piani 2013; Harrison and Easton 2002). The existence of lead actors – including those who bear a large proportion of the workload needed to start a collective effort and who try to get others on board – increases company engagement in the creation of private governance (Baumann-Pauly *et al.* 2017; Dashwood 2014; Backhouse *et al.* 2006).

*Perceived urgency:* According to some authors, whether or not potential participants perceive the problem that could be addressed through private governance as an urgent one, has a positive influence on their decision to engage in the creation of private governance and on the pace of the institutionalization process of a respective effort (Reinecke and Donaghey 2015; Bonnedahl and Eriksson 2011; Backhouse *et al.* 2006).

*Problem type and goal homogeneity:* The more the perceptions and motivations of participants in a private governance initiative are aligned or complementary, the easier it is to set up private governance. Hence, according to the extant literature, whether or not companies engage in creating private governance arguably depends on the type of problem at hand (Vandenbergh 2013; Héritier and Eckert 2009; Auld *et al.* 2008).

*Risk of free-riding and shirking:* Many authors highlight that it is important to forge private governance in such a way that *free-riding* and *shirking* (sometimes also called “second-order free-riding”) are discouraged. Here, free-riding refers to companies not participating in a given private governance initiative, but benefitting from industry-wide reputational gains resulting from it. Shirking refers to companies participating in an initiative without actually committing to the obligations associated with it. If free-riding and shirking are not discouraged, some authors suggest that private governance may become too costly for those willing to participate, thereby negatively influencing company engagement in the creation of private governance (Zeyen *et al.* 2016; Conley and Williams 2011; Engert 2010).

*Maturity of the company and the industry:* According to some authors, companies as well as industries need to reach a certain level of maturity in order to openly acknowledge the



existence of a problem and to engage in creating private governance and open dialogue in order to resolve it (Cid Aguayo and Barriga 2016; Glasbergen 2013; Gunningham 1995). As an example, Cid Aguayo and Barriga (2016) discuss that the Chilean Salmon industry, following disease outbreaks, was forced to rethink its business model. This process of industrial learning, combined with other factors, contributed to the creation of an environmental aquaculture standard.

### ***Micro-level contextual aspects***

We call the third category of contextual aspects that we have identified in the extant literature, influencing companies' engagement in the creation of private governance, the *micro level*. This category consists of contextual aspects that focus on characteristics and processes at the level of the individual person. Only 7 of the total 97 papers we analyzed on the subject of private governance included micro-level contextual aspects.

*Values of individual managers:* A very small number of authors have started to focus on the role and discretion of individual managers. These authors emphasize the importance of individual managers' values and beliefs (e.g., regarding corporate social responsibility issues) in their decision to engage in the creation of private governance (Dashwood 2014; Conley and Williams 2011; Bernstein and Cashore 2007). Conley and Williams (2011, p. 562) use the term "internal champions" to refer to "powerful and persuasive executives who believe in corporate social responsibility in general" and the specific private governance initiative, in particular. The extant literature suggests that the more a manager believes in and values corporate social responsibility, the more likely the company she represents is to engage in the creation of private governance (Dashwood 2014; Conley and Williams 2011).

*Managers' belief in win-win solutions:* In a similar vein, individual company representatives' belief in the possibility to achieve a win-win solution for business and society/ the environment has an influence on their engagement in the creation of private governance (Dashwood 2014; Vogel 2008). Thus, according to some authors, if a company representative believes that

benefits are to be expected for both the company and society or the environment, the company she represents is more likely to engage in the creation of private governance (Dashwood 2014).

## **DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR A FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA**

To the best of our knowledge, we are the first to have *systematically* identified and analyzed the relevant literature on the antecedents of company engagement in the creation of private governance. While earlier literature reviews (de Bakker et al., 2019; Vogel, 2008) have provided substantial contributions by systematizing the debate and by theorizing on private governance in general, we go beyond these earlier works by providing the first systematic literature review with a distinct focus on company engagement in the *creation* of private governance.

Most recently, de Bakker et al. (2019) reviewed the literature on multi-stakeholder initiatives (MSI) for sustainability. The broader design of their review, focusing on the input, institutionalization as well as the impact dimension of MSIs, does not allow for an in-depth discussion of the question that leads our research, i.e., why companies become first movers and engage in *creating* private governance. De Bakker et al. (2019) identify input legitimacy and the politics of standards development as sub-themes, however, they do not discuss companies' motivations to engage in standards development.

In order to enhance the "epistemic connectedness" (Hoyningen-Huene, 2013, p. 120), we have assumed an integrative perspective that includes a range of interdisciplinary literature on corporate participation in the creation of private governance in our review. We go beyond a descriptive approach by synthesizing the research on antecedents of company engagement in the creation of private governance (see section 0, Figure 3 and *Table II*).

Building on our analysis, we derived a preliminary framework of the antecedents of company engagement in private governance. This framework provides a structured graphical representation including analytical distinctions between two sets of factors, i.e., *drivers* with

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the underlying categories of reputation, regulation, risk, and opportunities as well as *contextual aspects* with the underlying micro, meso, and macro categories. Moreover, and equally derived from the literature, we provide indicators for how the contextual aspects may influence company engagement in the creation of private governance (see *Table II*, Figure 3).

The new level of systematicity regarding the antecedents of company engagement in the creation of private governance we provided, contributes to management and organization research and PCSR scholarship in general and to research on private governance in particular, by enabling a clearer vision of *what is currently known and what is missing* – across disciplines and fields – concerning the antecedents of company engagement in the creation of private governance. The framework and our research leading up to it help to pinpoint empirical, epistemological and theoretical challenges and suggest a future research agenda with regard to the creation of private governance.

**The epistemological necessity to study a wider variety of private governance initiatives**

Vogel (2008) in his review warned that research on private governance studies a too narrow sample of industries and too few initiatives. We found that more than a decade later and with a special focus on the creation of private governance, variety is still insufficient (see Figure 2). The MSI database lists more than 40 private governance initiatives covering a broad variety of issues and industries (MSI Integrity 2020). In addition to the multi-stakeholder initiatives listed in the MSI database, a multitude of industry-wide standards (such as the chemical industry's Responsible Care initiative) exists. We found that this diversity is not represented in the existing research on company engagement in the creation of private governance (see Figure 2). The top five initiatives we identified in the extant literature are Responsible Care, the Forest Stewardship Council, the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh, the Roundtable for Sustainable Palm Oil, and the Fair Labor Initiative. Our research indicates that other private governance initiatives have received substantially less scholarly attention. Moreover, the current discourse on company engagement in the creation of private governance appears to be

skewed towards certification-based standards, since no principles-based standards are among the five most discussed initiatives.

The lack of variety regarding the industries and initiatives studied with regard to the creation of private governance is not only an empirical shortcoming, but provides serious epistemological limitations. Because of the pronounced dominance of a few initiatives, the knowledge compiled concerning company engagement in the creation of private governance is incomplete or might be failing us altogether. A student of the existing literature might easily assume that the antecedents of company engagement in the creation of private governance are identical to the factors for the five initiatives that are discussed most frequently in the extant literature while, in fact, more or different drivers and contextual factors might be relevant. We suggest that this epistemological shortcoming has the capacity to influence theory building (or has even done so already) with regard to answering the question of why companies engage in the creation of private governance. We will illustrate this point in what follows:

### **The dominance of the business case logic regarding company engagement in the creation of private governance**

De Bakker et al. (2019), in their broader and more general literature review on MSIs for sustainability, argue that the discourse on this phenomenon remains weakly theorized and that many “contributions merely focus on reporting results and hence remain fairly descriptive, not offering a solid contribution to theory development” (de Bakker et al., 2019, p. 344). We can confirm this assessment for the literature on antecedents of company engagement in the creation of private governance. However, our research unveils the dominance of a theoretical scheme that aims to explain why companies engage in the creation of private governance, namely an instrumental business-case logic. Our framework – which reflects the current state of research – suggests that the main drivers for businesses to engage in the creation of private governance are instrumental, i.e., companies see a business case to become norm-makers (see Figure 3 and Appendix B). The impression our framework conveys is in line with the theoretical assumptions

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of nonmarket strategy (Grabs *et al.* (2020) refer to this as “calculated strategic behavior”). Nonmarket strategy (NMS) research views firms as rational, self-interested actors who engage in the creation of private governance to improve their market position, to increase their profits, or to preempt governmental regulation (Lyon 2018; Mellahi *et al.* 2016). While it is beyond the scope of this literature review to rebut the theoretical assumptions underlying the NMS perspective, our analysis allows us to report some challenges to the view that companies primarily engage in the creation of private governance for instrumental business case reasons.

We found that the existing research on company engagement in the creation of private governance predominantly focuses on private governance efforts in industries that recently faced severe public relations problems. In the investigated cases, the instrumental business-case logic is inherent. We suggest that the dominant research focus on industries and companies with reputational issues has led to the interpretation that reputational and regulatory reasons are the main drivers for company engagement in the creation of private governance (see p. 66). Where companies are subject to reputational threats, and in many cases have to expect harsher governmental regulations, they experience a robust instrumental motivation to engage in creating private governance. Consequently, the results from this stream of research suggest that companies indeed primarily engage in the creation of private governance for instrumental reasons (Kraft and Raz 2017; Knudsen 2013). In other words, when research primarily focuses on cases where companies instrumentally engage in the creation of private governance to protect their reputation, or to protect themselves against harsher regulation (i.e., for instrumental reasons), it is not surprising that theory that explains company engagement by rational, self-interested motives (e.g., non-market strategy) becomes dominant.

In order to allow for alternative, or at least more justified (inductive) theory building, we suggest that the diversity of existing initiatives needs to be mirrored better by private governance research, covering a broader range of industries – including those industries and companies that are less publicly visible and are not currently threatened by reputational or

regulatory issues. Respective studies may replicate, refine, extend, or even contradict the currently dominant view of companies' engagement in the creation of private governance as primarily rational, instrumental and self-interested.

### **The need to strengthen the research on contextual aspects**

In addition, as our research results (see section 0) and our framework indicate (see Figure 3 and *Table II*), the engagement of companies in the creation of private governance cannot exclusively be explained by (dominantly instrumental) drivers, but needs to be viewed in relation to contextual aspects. We analyzed and structured the contextual aspects that have been identified in the extant literature into macro-, meso- and micro-level categories. Noticeably, the research on the contextual aspects with regard to the creation of private governance falls significantly short relatively to the research on drivers, i.e., only 22 of the 97 analyzed sources extensively investigate contextual aspects. One explanation for this is that many existing articles discuss antecedents of company engagement in private governance in rather general and abstract terms, while there seems to be lack of in-depth empirical case studies on the phenomenon.

Our framework entails literature-based suggestions for how the contextual aspects might facilitate (+) or impede (-) company engagement in the creation of private governance (see Figure 3 as well as the descriptions of the individual contextual aspects in the results section). The framework, however, cannot specify if the contextual aspects moderate or mediate, nor does it entail any descriptions of how the contextual aspects possibly influence each other. The reason for this limitation is a gap in the existing literature that could have informed us on these relationships. We, however, hope that our framework might serve as blueprint for future theoretical and empirical work that aims to provide a more nuanced answer of why (drivers) and under what circumstances (contextual aspects) companies engage in the creation of private governance. Besides the demanding task of further developing this comprehensive framework in general (e.g., by clarifying further relationships between drivers and contextual factors), we

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have identified a number of urgencies for future research regarding the contextual factors in particular.

With regard to the macro level of contextual aspects, a segment of the political-institutional literature has already begun to focus on the creation of private governance (Reinecke and Ansari 2016; Dashwood 2014; Bartley 2007). This scholarship draws from social movement literature to explain how firms are pressured by activists, consumers, and others into assuming responsibility for particular issues. Bartley (2007), using examples of the creation of private governance in the forestry and in the apparel industry, describes this process as political conflicts among governmental, civil society, and business actors about how global business activities should be regulated. Reinecke and Ansari (2016), drawing from framing theory, studied conflict minerals in the Democratic Republic of Congo. They distinguish between instances where companies are pressured by activists and follow a compliance approach to maintain their legitimacy and instances where interactions among the various actor groups lead companies to accept responsibility and to take a proactive role in addressing social ills by creating private governance. These studies provide valuable theoretical starting points that have the capacity to complement and also challenge the dominant explanatory scheme (i.e., NMS) regarding explanations of company engagement in the creation of private governance via other theoretical perspectives such as political CSR, political institutionalism, social movement research, and institutional entrepreneurship. Studies using these perspectives are, however, underrepresented (see Appendix B) and thus provide a research gap that could (and should) be addressed by future research.

With regard to the meso level, we particularly found that current research on company engagement in the creation of private governance misses a more detailed focus on firms' moral orientations. This additional meso-level aspect could guide companies' actions in creating private governance. De Bakker et al. (2019), in their current review on the adoption of private governance, highlight that "mission driven firms", for example those that are organized in the

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World Fair Trade Organization (WFTO), emphasize norms like “fairness” and “partnership.” The authors suggest that although instrumental motives are not completely absent in mission-driven firms, “it is also clear that the adoption of MSIs by certain organizations cannot be sufficiently explained without acknowledging other ethical perspectives” (de Bakker et al., 2019, p. 364). Although our review focuses on the creation rather than the adoption of private governance, we suggest that the orientation of firms towards specific norms, including the respective pronounced company values, should be integrated as a more nuanced meso-level aspect that has the capacity to influence company engagement in the creation of private governance. Similar to de Bakker et al. (2019), we suggest that it would be foolish to argue that instrumental motives are completely absent in value-driven firms. It would, however, be equally unreasonable not to take the values and the mission-drivenness of firms into account when explaining the engagement of companies in the creation of private governance.

With regard to the micro-level contextual aspects that have the capacity to influence the decision of a company to engage in the creation of private governance, we found that there is almost a complete lack of research into these aspects (e.g., leadership styles, psychological factors, moral orientations of CEOs and/or sustainability or public affairs managers). This finding mirrors the partial neglect of micro aspects in the more general research of CSR, as reported by Aguinis and Glavas (cf. Gond and Moser 2021; 2012) and PCSR (Frynas and Stephens 2015). While 50 of the articles we analyzed discuss macro-level contextual aspects to some extent, and 78 articles take at least one meso-level aspect into consideration, only 7 of the total 97 analyzed papers included micro-level contextual aspects. The neglect of micro-level aspects is a significant research gap and presents a profound blind spot regarding the antecedents of company engagement in the creation of private governance. Extant private governance research does not inform well about how individual managers (as well as their inclinations) positively or negatively influence company engagement in the creation of private governance. Dashwood (2014) already emphasized the role of managerial discretion and the



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mindsets of individual managers and demands that these aspects should not be underestimated in the context of private governance research. We are echoing this demand. The interplay between the actions taken by (powerful) individuals within companies and their inclinations presents an important and relevant avenue for future research. As Aguinis and Glavas (2012) stated with regard to the question of company engagement in CSR activities, “Personal values are part of the decision-making processes whether individuals realize it or not, so it is important to understand how values influence engagement in CSR” (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012, p. 947).

Neighboring literatures (e.g., on social issue selling, (P)CSR and institutional entrepreneurship) have already begun to take micro factors into consideration and research on the creation of private governance could be informed by it (see Aguinis and Glavas 2012 and Frynas and Stephens 2015 for overviews). Wickert and Bakker (2016), for instance, argue that CSR managers aim to sell social issues to potential issue buyers within an organizational context and, in their article, explore the motivation, aspirations, and strategies of issue sellers. A similar approach may be insightful for understanding the role of “internal champions” that convince their organizations to engage in creating private governance. Similarly, Acosta et al. (2019) highlight the relevance of micro-politics (e.g., how local lower-level managers cope with the new political role of multinational corporations) in implementing corporate social responsibility and future research should explore the role of micro-political factors in the context of company engagement in the creation of private governance. Moreover, Aguilera *et al.* (2007) developed a conceptual framework that indicates how employee psychological needs influence engagement in CSR. Rupp (2011), building on this, offers suggestions for how organizational justice explains why employees are driven by motives other than self-interest such as relational and moral reasons when engaging in CSR. Maak *et al.* (2016) highlight the importance of managers’ leadership styles with respect to political corporate social responsibility and private governance. Another under-researched aspect is the role of positive and negative emotion in companies’ engagement in the creation of private governance. Aside

from Reinecke and Ansari's (2016) work drawing from framing theory, this aspect seems to be underexplored to date. Against this backdrop, we suggest that it is necessary to open the black box of the corporation and to focus on micro-level dynamics when we want to understand better why companies engage in the creation of private governance.

Once more, some of the results on micro factors in neighboring disciplines indicate that companies not only engage in social issues for purely self-interested reasons and that engagement decisions are not exclusively derived from solid rational processes. Similar to the macro and meso factors mentioned above, we do not suggest that companies (and their managers) are not driven by rational and instrumental factors. We, however, do suggest that research needs to acknowledge and to incorporate micro-level factors in order to better understand why companies decide to engage in the creation of private governance.

## **Conclusion**

Against the backdrop of governance gaps and numerous social and environmental challenges, companies are widely perceived as political actors that have a responsibility to not only comply with the rules of the game, but to (co-)create them. Simultaneously, however, the knowledge regarding antecedents of company engagement in creating private governance is fragmented and entails uncertainties. Consequently, building on extant knowledge to better understand the phenomenon and to give informed advice to practice is difficult. Therefore, with this systematic literature review, we set out to contribute to the research by bringing systematicity to a fragmented field, to shed light on what is known and unknown regarding the phenomenon, to reflect on theoretical and epistemological challenges, and to suggest a future research agenda. Our analysis indicates that companies are seen to become norm-makers primarily for instrumental reasons. This interpretation is in line with the dominant theoretical approach within private governance research, i.e., a non-market strategy perspective. We suggest that the current research is biased towards a sample of industries and initiatives that give upwind to the current theoretical dominance. This bias might be one of the reasons why alternative

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explanations are severely underrepresented in the extant research. Moreover, we found that research on meso- and micro- level contextual aspects is lacking. Against the backdrop of our review, we therefore make extensive suggestions for future research.

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Zeyen, A., Beckmann, M. and Wolters, S. (2016). Actor and institutional dynamics in the development of multi-stakeholder initiatives. *Journal of Business Ethics*, **135**(2), pp. 341–360.

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**TABLES**

*Table 1: Disciplines and fields of the articles included in this review*

<b>Source</b>	<b>Categories (SSCI, SCIE, ESCI)</b>	<b>No. of articles</b>
Journal of Business Ethics	Business, Ethics	7
Regulation & Governance	Political Science, Public Administration, Law	6
Annual Review of Environment and Resources	Environmental Sciences	5
Business & Society	Business	5
Business and Politics	Business, Economics & Business	4
California Management Review	Business, Management	3
Geoforum	Environmental Studies	3
Academy of Management Journal	Business, Management	2
Annual Review of Political Science	Political Science	2
Business Ethics Quarterly	Business, Ethics	2
European Business Organization Law Review	Law, Business	2
Global Environmental Change-Human And Policy Dimensions	Environmental Studies, Geography	2
Global Environmental Politics	Environmental Studies, Political Science, International Relations	2
Journal of Cleaner Production	Green & Sustainable Science & Technology, Environmental Sciences	2
Law & Policy	Law	2
Marine Policy	Environmental Studies, International Relations	2
Organization	Management	2
Policy Studies Journal	Political Science, Public Administration	2
Sustainability	Green & Sustainable Science & Technology, Environmental Studies	2
Academy of Management Review	Business, Management	1
Agriculture and Human Values	Social Science Interdisciplinary	1
American Journal of Sociology	Sociology	1
Business Strategy and The Environment	Environmental Studies, Business, Management	1
Cornell International Law Journal	International Relations, Law	1
Cornell Law Review	Law	1
Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management	Environmental Studies, Business, Management	1
Ecological Economics	Environmental Studies, Economics	1
Employee Relations	Management, Industrial Relations & Labor	1
Environmental Policy And Governance	Environmental Studies	1
European Journal of Law and Economics	Economics, Law	1
Global Governance	Political Science	1
Global Society	Social Sciences Interdisciplinary, International Relations	1
Governance-An International Journal of Policy Administration and Institutions	Political Science, Public Administration	1
Governance-An International Journal of Policy and Administration	Political Science, Public Administration	1
Human Relations	Social Sciences Interdisciplinary, Management	1

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Human Resource Management	Management, Applied Psychology	1
Industrial Marketing Management	Business, Management	1
Internet Policy Review	Social Sciences General, Law	1
Journal of Agricultural & Environmental Ethics	Ethics	1
Journal of Economics & Management Strategy	Economics, Management	1
Journal of Law and Society	Sociology, Law	1
Journal of Management Studies	Management	1
Journal of Marketing Channels	Business, Economics & Business	1
Journal of Public Economics	Economics	1
Journal of Public Policy & Marketing	Business	1
Journal of Risk Research	Social Sciences Interdisciplinary	1
Journal of Rural Studies	Environmental Studies	1
Management Research Review	Management, Economics & Business	1
MIS Quarterly	Management, Information Science & Library Science	1
Natural Resources Forum	Environmental Studies	1
Organization Science	Management	1
Politics & Society	Political Science, Sociology, Social Issues	1
Production And Operations Management	Operations Research & Management Science, Engineering & Manufacturing	1
Public Administration	Political Science, Public Administration	1
Resources Policy	Environmental Studies	1
Review of Social Economy	Economics, Economics & Business	1
Scandinavian Journal of Management	Management	1
Strategic Management Journal	Business, Management	1
Environment and Planning C-Government and Policy	Political Science	1



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Table II: Research matrix of contextual aspects

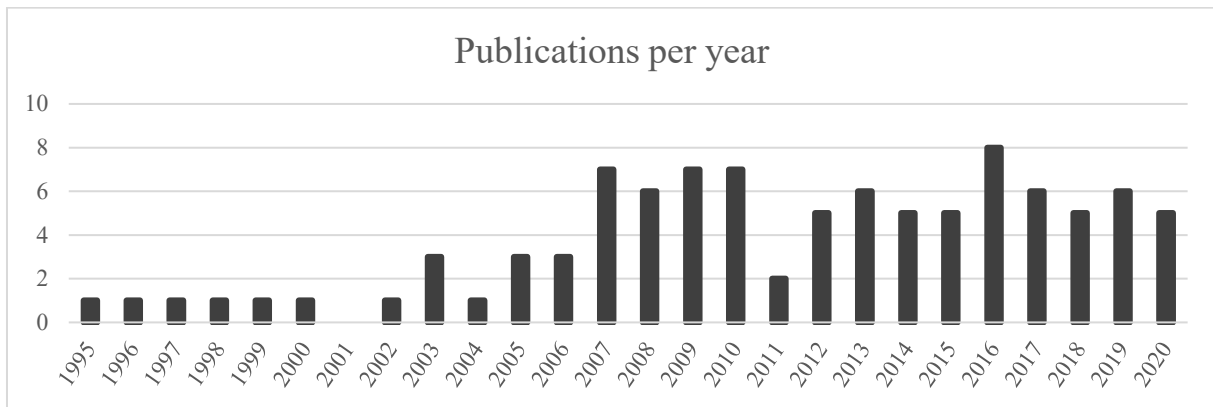
<b>Contextual aspects</b>		
<b>Macro level</b>		
+	Raised societal expectations	e.g. Vogel 2008; Bernstein and Cashore 2007
+	Political contestations	e.g. Levy <i>et al.</i> 2016; Bartley 2007
+	Confidence in market-based solutions	e.g. Chan and Pattberg 2008; Bernstein and Cashore 2007
+	Strong national institutions regarding CSR	e.g. Conley and Williams 2011; Chan and Pattberg 2008
–	Competition law	e.g. Vandenberg 2013; Arya and Salk 2006
<b>Meso level</b>		
+	firm demographics	Firm size: e.g. Bakan 2015; Dashwood 2014 Firm resources: e.g. Bernstein and Cashore 2007 Firm visibility: e.g. Amekawa 2009
+/-	firm's social/environmental performance	+: e.g. Knudsen 2013 –: e.g. Prakash and Potoski 2007; King and Lenox 2000
+	existing networks	e.g. Cid Aguayo and Barriga 2016; Delmas and Montes-Sancho 2010
+	maturity of the industry/firm	e.g. Cid Aguayo and Barriga 2016
+	predecessors in other industries/countries	e.g. Gulbrandsen 2008
+	frequent informal contact with stakeholders	e.g. Schneiker and Joachim 2017
+	presence of lead actors	e.g. Dashwood 2014
+	perceived urgency	e.g. Reinecke and Donaghey 2015
+	goal homogeneity	e.g. Vandenberg 2013; Héritier and Eckert 2009
+/-	problem type	+: coordination problems, e.g. Héritier and Eckert 2009 –: prisoner's dilemma problems, e.g. Héritier and Eckert 2009
–	risk of free-riding/shirking	e.g. Zeyen <i>et al.</i> 2016; Engert 2010
<b>Micro level</b>		
+	manager's CSR values	e.g. Conley and Williams 2011
+	manager's belief in win-win solutions	e.g. Dashwood 2014

Legend:

(+) indicates contextual aspects (as derived from extant literature) that have the capacity to facilitate (+) or to impede (-) company engagement in the creation of private governance

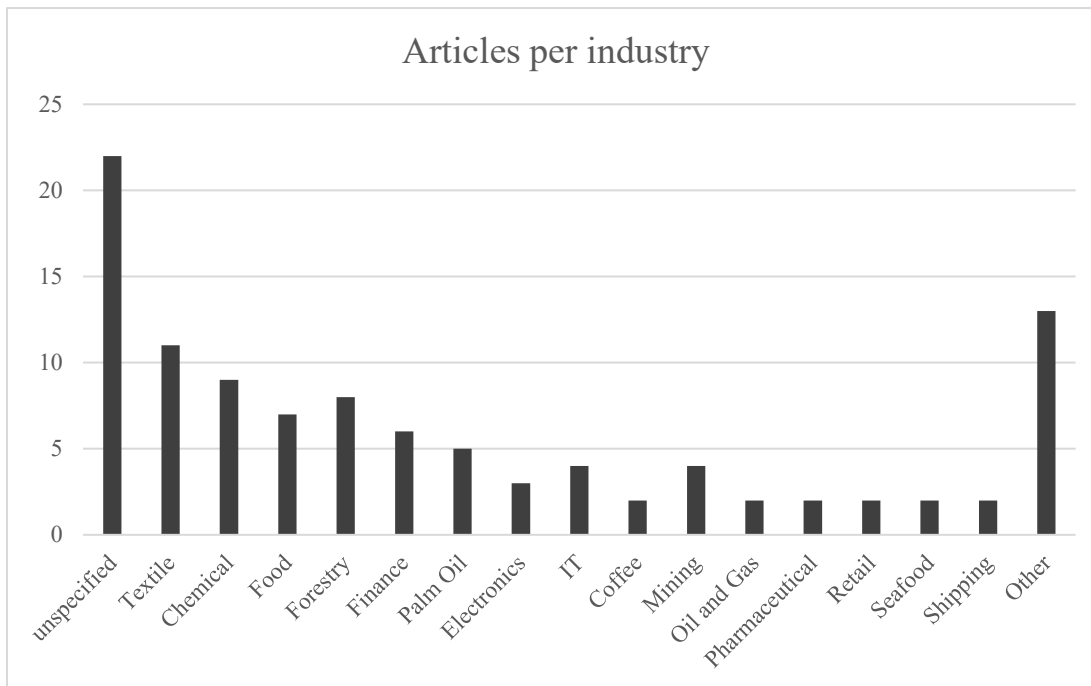
*(Given the large number of references for many of the contextual aspects, only exemplary references are provided here. Full references are available from the authors upon request)*

**FIGURES**



*Figure 1: Publication year of the articles analyzed (n=97)*

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*Figure 2: Articles per private governance initiative. Accord=Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety, CERES=Coalition for Environmentally Responsible Economies, FLA=Fair Labor Initiative, FSC=Forest Stewardship Council, Global GAP=Global Good Agricultural Practice, RSPO=Roundtable for Sustainable Palm Oil.*

**Contextual Aspects** (i.e., factors that can facilitate or impede company engagement in the creation of private governance).

**Macro level**

- + raised societal expectations
- + political contestations
- + confidence in market-based solutions
- + strong national institutions regarding CSR
- competition law

**Meso level**

- + firm size, resources, visibility
- + existing networks
- + maturity of the industry/firm
- + predecessors in other industries/countries
- + frequent informal contact with stakeholders
- + presence of lead actors
- + perceived urgency
- + goal homogeneity

**Drivers** (i.e., int. and ext. motivations and pressures that lead companies to engage in the creation of private governance)

**Reputation-associated drivers**

- ex-post: reputation protection
- ex-ante: reputation building

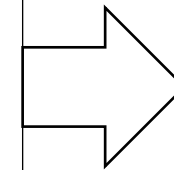
**Regulation-associated drivers**

- ex-post: evading regulation
- ex-ante: closing governance gaps

**Risk-associated drivers**

- reducing risk

**Outcome**



**Legend:**

Contextual aspects (as derived from extant literature) that have the capacity to facilitate (+) or to impede (-) company engagement in the creation of private governance

*Figure 3: A preliminary framework of the antecedents of company engagement in private governance*

## APPENDIX A: SEARCH STRING

Headword	Terms (including conceptual cousins)
<b>private governance</b>	<p>TS=(“norm-mak*” OR “norm mak*” OR “creat* norms” OR “creation of norms” OR “creation of a norm” OR “creat* a framework of norms” OR “develop* norms” OR “develop* a norm” OR “negotiat* norms” OR “negotiat* a norm” OR “establish* norms” OR “establish* a norm” OR “mak* norms” OR “mak* a norm” OR “set* norms” OR “set* a norm” OR “construct* norms” OR “construct* a norm” OR “rule-mak*” OR “rule mak*” OR “rule-sett*” OR “rule sett*” OR “creat* rules” OR “creat* a rule” OR “creation of rules” OR “creation of a standard” OR “creat* a framework of rules” OR “develop* rules” OR “develop* a rule” OR “negotiat* rules” OR “negotiat* a rule” OR “establish* rules” OR “establish* a rule” OR “mak* rules” OR “mak* a rule” OR “set* up rules” OR “set* up a rule” OR “construct* rules” OR “construct* a rule” OR “creat* standards” OR “creat* a standard” OR “creation of standards” OR “creation of a standard” OR “creat* a framework of standards” OR “develop* standards” OR “develop* a standard” OR “negotiat* standards” OR “negotiate* a standard” OR “establish* standards” OR “establish* a standard” OR “mak* standards” OR “mak* a standard” OR “set* standards” OR “set* a standard” OR “construct* standards” OR “construct* a standard” OR “creat* regulations” OR “creat* a regulation” OR “creat* a regulatory framework” OR “creat* a framework of regulation\$” OR “develop* regulations” OR “develop* a regulation” OR “negotiat* regulations” OR “negotiat* a regulation” OR “establish* regulations” OR “establish* a regulation” OR “mak* regulations” OR “mak* a regulation” OR “set* up regulations” OR “set* up a regulation” OR “construct* regulations” OR “construct* a regulation” OR “industry-wide code\$” OR “industrywide code\$” OR “rule\$ for business” OR “rule\$ that go* beyond the law” OR “private regulation\$” “norm\$ that go* beyond the law” OR “rule\$ to govern business” OR “norm\$ to govern business” OR “rule\$ for global governance” OR “civil regulation\$” OR “market-driven governance” OR “market driven governance” OR “market-based governance” OR “market based governance” OR “market-led governance” OR “market led governance” OR “business-led governance” OR “business led governance” OR “business-driven governance” OR “business driven governance” OR “industry-led governance” OR “industry led governance” OR “industry-driven governance” OR “industry driven governance” OR “industry self-regulat*” OR “private regulation\$” OR “private governance” OR “private standard*” OR “voluntary standard*” OR “voluntary rule*” OR “voluntary regulation\$” OR “voluntary governance” OR “voluntary industry code\$” OR “voluntary agreement\$” OR “voluntary framework\$” OR “industry-led standard*” OR “industry led standard*” OR “industry-driven standard*” OR “industry driven standard*” OR “industry* governance” OR “self-regulatory arrangement\$” OR “self-regulatory framework\$” OR “multi-stakeholder initiative\$” OR “multi-stakeholder governance” OR “multi-stakeholder standard\$” OR “multi-stakeholder partnership\$” OR “cross-sector partnership\$” OR “cross-sector initiative\$” OR “cross-sector governance” OR “preemptive governance” OR “private authority” OR “private-sector initiative\$” OR “private-sector governance” OR “private-sector standard\$” OR “business governance” OR “transnational governance”)</p>

**APPENDIX B: ARTICLES INCLUDED IN THIS REVIEW**

<b>Title</b>	<b>Authors</b>	<b>Theoretical perspective</b>	<b>Discipline/Field</b>	<b>Underlying assumption</b>	<b>Source Title</b>	<b>Publication Year</b>
Bridging the gap - Non-state actors and the challenges of regulating new technology	Abbot, C.	Regulatory design	Law	instrumental	Journal of Law and Society	2012
Perspectives on corporate social responsibility in the chemical sector: A comparative analysis of the Mexican and South African cases	Acutt, NJ; Medina-Ross, V; O'Riordan, T	CSR	Environmental Studies	mainly instrumental (critical)	Natural Resources Forum	2004
Reflections on the Growing Influence of Good Agricultural Practices in the Global South	Amekawa, Yuichiro	Ecological modernization, risk society theory	Ethics, Sociology	instrumental	Journal of Agricultural & Environmental Ethics	2009
Global environmental standards for industry	Angel, David P.; Hamilton, Trina; Huber, Matthew T.	Regulatory design	Environmental Studies	instrumental	Annual Review of Environment and Resources	2007
Cross-sector alliance learning and effectiveness of voluntary codes of corporate social responsibility	Arya, B; Salk, JE	Collaborative learning, CSR	Business Ethics	mainly instrumental	Business Ethics Quarterly	2006
The new corporate social responsibility	Auld, Graeme; Bernstein, Steven; Cashore, Benjamin	CSR	Environmental Studies	mainly instrumental	Annual Review of Environment and Resources	2008
The dynamics of otc derivatives regulation: Bridging the public-private divide	Awrey, Dan	Welfare economics	Business, Law	instrumental (critical)	European Business Organization Law Review	2010
Circuits of power in creating de jure standards: Shaping an international information systems security standard	Backhouse, James; Hsu, Carol W.; Silva, Leiser	New institutional theory, circuits of power	Management ; Business	instrumental, "feeling responsible"	Mis Quarterly	2006

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The invisible hand of law: pPrivate regulation and the rule of law	Bakan, Joel	CSR	Law	instrumental (critical)	Cornell International Law Journal	2015
Explaining dynamic strategies for defending company legitimacy: The changing outcomes of anti-sweatshop campaigns in france and switzerland	Balsiger, P	Social movement	Business	institutional context, instrumental	Business & Society	2018
The sustainable seafood movement is a governance concert, with the audience playing a key role	Barclay, Kate; Miller, Alice	CSR	Environmental Studies	instrumental	Sustainability	2018
Good fences make good neighbors: a longitudinal analysis of an industry self-regulatory institution	Barnett, Michael L.; King, Andrew A.	Economic institutionalism	Business, Management	instrumental	Academy of Management Journal	2008
Certifying forests and factories: States, social movements, and the rise of private regulation in the apparel and forest products fields	Bartley, T	Sociological institutionalism	Political Science, Sociology	institutional context, instrumental	Politics & Society	2003
Institutional emergence in an era of globalization: The rise of transnational private regulation of labor and environmental conditions	Bartley, T.	Sociological institutionalism, market-based approach	Sociology	institutional context, instrumental	American Journal of Sociology	2007
Industry-specific multi-stakeholder initiatives that govern corporate human rights standards: Legitimacy assessments of the fair labor association and the global network initiative	Baumann-Pauly, Dorothee; Nolan, Justine; van Heerden, Aurret; Samway, Michael	Business and human rights	Business Ethics	instrumental	Journal of Business Ethics	2017
Collectively designing csr through meta-organizations: A case study of the oil and gas industry	Berkowitz, H., Bucheli, M., Dumez, H.	CSR; meta-organization theory	Business Ethics	instrumental	Journal of Business Ethics	2017
(Self-)regulation of sharing economy platforms through partial meta-organizing	Berkowitz, H; Souchaud, A	Meta-organization theory	Business Ethics	institutional context, instrumental	Journal of Business Ethics	2019

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Can non-state global governance be legitimate? An analytical framework	Bernstein, Steven; Cashore, Benjamin	Political legitimacy; CSR	Political Science	instrumental, institutional context, values	Regulation & Governance	2007
Social standards: Toward an active ethical involvement of businesses in developing countries	Beschorner, Thomas; Mueller, Martin	Reflexive modernity, reflexive right	Business Ethics	normative, instrumental	Journal of Business Ethics	2007
Is there room for environmental self-regulation in the mining sector?	Bomse, O; Borkey, P; Glachant, M; Leveque, F	Economic institutionalism	Environment al Studies	instrumental	Resources Policy	1996
Voluntary environmental programs: Assessing their effectiveness	Borck, Jonathan C.; Coglianese, Cary	Economic institutionalism	Environment al Studies	instrumental	Annual Review of Environment and Resources	2009
Marking their own homework: The pragmatic and moral legitimacy of industry self-regulation	Bowen, F	Strategic management, institutional, critical management perspectives	Business Ethics	institutional context, instrumental	Journal of Business Ethics	2019
Exploring the role of employer forums - the case of Business in the Community Wales	Bowkett, Cassandra; Hauptmeier, Marco; Heery, Edmund	CSR, Collective Action	Management	instrumental	Employee Relations	2017
Counting on codes: An examination of transnational codes as a regulatory governance mechanism for nanotechnologies	Bowman, Diana M.; Hodge, Graeme A.	Responsive regulation	Law, Political Science	instrumental	Regulation & Governance	2009
Why would corporations behave in socially responsible ways? An institutional theory of corporate social responsibility	Campbell, John L.	Sociological institutionalism	Business	institutional context, instrumental	Academy of Management Review	2007
Building a roundtable for a sustainable hazelnut supply chain	Castro, NR; Swart, J	Partnerships	Environment al Studies	institutional context,	Journal of Cleaner Production	2017



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				instrumental		
Private rule-making and the politics of accountability: Analyzing global forest governance	Chan, Sander; Pattberg, Philipp	Accountability	Environmental studies, Political Science	institutional context, instrumental	Global Environmental Politics	2008
Corporate environmentalism: Motivations and mechanisms	Chrun, Elizabeth; Dolsak, Nives; Prakash, Aseem	CSR	Environmental Studies	institutional context, instrumental	Annual Review of Environment and Resources	2016
Behind certification and regulatory processes: Contributions to a political history of the Chilean salmon farming	Cid Aguayo, Beatriz Eugenia; Barriga, Jose	Political ecology	Sociology	institutional context, instrumental	Global Environmental Change-Human and Policy Dimensions	2016
Global banks as global sustainability regulators? The equator principles	Conley, John M.; Williams, Cynthia A.	Development anthropology	Law	institutional context, instrumental	Law & Policy	2011
Sustainable development and industry self-regulation: Developments in the global mining sector	Dashwood, Hevina S.	Sociological institutionalism, historical institutionalism	Business	institutional context, instrumental	Business & Society	2014
Intellectual property and pharmaceutical drugs: An ethical analysis	De George, RT	Business and human rights, Duty-based ethics	Business Ethics	normative, instrumental	Business Ethics Quarterly	2005
Perspectives of natural resource sector firms on collaborative approaches to governance for water	de Loë, R.C., Murray, D., Brisbois, M.C.	Collaborative governance	Environmental Studies	instrumental (critical)	Journal of Cleaner Production	2016
Beyond the win-win: Creating shared value requires ethical frameworks	de los Reyes, Gaston, Jr.; Scholz, Markus; Smith, N. Craig	Creating shared value, hypernorms, deliberation	Business, Management	normative, instrumental	California Management Review	2017

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Voluntary agreements to improve environmental quality: Symbolic and substantive cooperation	Delmas, Magali A.; Montes-Sancho, Maria J.	Corporate political strategy	Business, Management	institutional context, instrumental	Strategic Management Journal	2010
From employment relations to consumption relations: Balancing labor governance in global supply chains	Donaghey, Jimmy; Reinecke, Juliane; Niforou, Christina; Lawson, Benn	Power relations	Management	institutional context, instrumental	Human Resource Management	2014
Self-inflicted industry wounds: Early warning signals and pelican gambits	Donaldson, T., Schoemaker, P.J.H.	Collective strategy	Business, Management	instrumental	California Management Review	2013
Examining the role of the forest industry in collaborative ecosystem management: Implications for corporate strategy	Dyke, J., Cash, S.B., Brody, S.D., Thornton, S.	Collaborative decision-making	Management	instrumental	Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management	2005
Interests need not be pursued if they can be created: private governance in African gold mining	Elbra, AD	Three faces of power	Political Science	instrumental (critical)	Business and Politics	2014
Transnational hedge fund regulation	Engert, Andreas	Economic institutionalism	Business, Law	instrumental (critical)	European Business Organization Law Review	2010
To the market and back? A study of the interplay between public policy and market-driven initiatives to improve farm animal welfare in the Danish pork sector	Esbjerg, L	Market-driven animal welfare	Social Science Interdisciplinary	institutional context, instrumental	Agriculture and Human Values	2020
Private roles in food safety provision: the law and economics of private food safety	Fagotto, Elena	Regulatory design	Economics, Law	instrumental	European Journal of Law And Economics	2014
The causes and consequences of private food governance	Fuchs, D; Kalfagianni, A	Private authority	Political Science	institutional context, instrumental	Business and Politics	2010

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Joint private safety standards and vertical relationships in food retailing	Giraud-Heraud, Eric; Hammoudi, Abdelhakim; Hoffmann, Ruben; Soler, Louis-Georges	Economic institutionalism	Economics, Management	instrumental	Journal of Economics & Management Strategy	2012
Legitimation of certifying partnerships in the global market place	Glasbergen, Pieter	Legitimization processes	Environmental Studies	institutional context, instrumental	Environmental Policy and Governance	2013
Enabling institutional investors' collective action: The role of the principles for responsible investment initiative	Gond, J.-P., Piani, V.	Collective action theory, stakeholder theory	Business	institutional context, instrumental	Business & Society	2013
Accountability arrangements in non-state standards organizations: Instrumental design and imitation	Gulbrandsen, Lars H.	Instrumental organisational design, institutional environments	Management	institutional context, instrumental	Organization	2008
Environment, self-regulation, and the chemical industry: Assessing responsible care	Gunningham, N.	Economic institutionalism	Social Science Interdisciplinary	instrumental (critical)	Law & Policy	1995
Transnational actors and transnational governance in global environmental politics	Hale, T	Governance	Political Science	institutional context, instrumental	Annual Review of Political Science	2020
Collective action in the face of international environmental regulation	Harrison, D., Easton, G.	Economic institutionalism	Business	instrumental	Business Strategy and The Environment	2002
The evolution of a global labor governance regime	Hassel, Anke	Non-state market-driven governance	Economics	instrumental	Governance-An International Journal of Policy Administration and Institutions	2008

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Shaping the aquaculture sustainability assemblage: Revealing the rule-making behind the rules	Havice, E; Iles, A	Assemblage approach	Environmental Studies	institutional context, instrumental	Geoforum	2015
Public orchestration, social networks, and transnational environmental governance: Lessons from the aviation industry	Henriksen, Lasse Folke; Ponte, Stefano	Orchestration	Law, Political Science	instrumental	Regulation & Governance	2018
Self-regulation by associations: Collective action problems in European environmental regulation	Héritier, A., Eckert, S.	Economic institutionalism	Political Science	instrumental	Business and Politics	2009
Framing sustainability: Alternative standards schemes for sustainable palm oil and South-South trade	Higgins, V; Richards, C	Framing	Social Science Interdisciplinary	institutional context, instrumental	Journal of Rural Studies	2019
The politics of surveillance policy: UK regulatory dynamics after Snowden	Hintz, Arne; Dencik, Lina	Communication Policy	Law	institutional context, instrumental	Internet Policy Review	2016
Governing without government? The private governance of forest certification in Sweden	Hysing, Erik	Governance	Political Science	instrumental	Public Administration	2009
Regulating factory safety in the Bangladeshi garment industry	James, P; Miles, L; Croucher, R; Houssart, M	Private regulatory regimes	Law, Political Science	institutional context, instrumental	Regulation & Governance	2019
Motivations for voluntary environmental management	Khanna, Madhu; Koss, Patricia; Jones, Cody; Ervin, David	Economic institutionalism	Political Science	instrumental	Policy Studies Journal	2007
Industry self-regulation without sanctions: The chemical industry's responsible care program	King, A.A., Lenox, M.J.	Economic institutionalism	Business, Management	instrumental (critical)	Academy of Management Journal	2000

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The growth of private regulation of labor standards in global supply chains: Mission impossible for western small- and medium-sized firms?	Knudsen, Jette Steen	Responsible supply chain management	Business, Political Science	instrumental (critical)	Journal of Business Ethics	2013
Collaborate or compete: Examining manufacturers' replacement strategies for a substance of concern	Kraft, T., Raz, G.	Economic institutionalism	Management	instrumental	Production and Operations Management	2017
Voluntary corporate environmental initiatives: a typology and preliminary investigation	Labatt, S; Maclaren, VW	Economic institutionalism	Environmental Studies	instrumental	Environment and Planning C- Government and Policy	1998
Sustainability standards: Interactions between private actors, civil society, and governments	Lambin, EF; Thorlakson, T	Interaction of private governance systems	Environmental Studies	institutional context, instrumental	Annual Review of Environment and Resources	2018
The governance of social standards in emerging markets: An exploration of actors and interests shaping trustea as a southern multi-stakeholder initiative	Langford, NJ	Production network	Economics	institutional context, instrumental	Geoforum	2019
Sustainable construction through industry self-regulation: The development and role of building environmental assessment methods in achieving green building	Leiringer, R	Strategic action fields	Environmental Studies	institutional context, instrumental	Sustainability	2020
The role of private decentralized institutions in sustaining industry self-regulation	Lenox, M.J.	Economic institutionalism	Management	instrumental	Organization Science	2006
Orchestrating transnational environmental governance in maritime shipping	Lister, Jane; Poulsen, Rene Taudal; Ponte, Stefano	Orchestration	Environmental Studies	institutional context, instrumental	Global Environmental Change-Human and Policy Dimensions	2015
Self-regulation, taxation and public voluntary environmental agreements	Lyon, TP; Maxwell, JW	Economic institutionalism	Economics	instrumental	Journal of Public Economics	2003

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Linking local experiments to global standards: How project networks promote global institution-building	Manning, Stephan; von Hagen, Oliver	Institutional entrepreneurship, Sociological institutionalism	Management	institutional context, instrumental	Scandinavian Journal of Management	2010
Emerging international human rights norms for transnational corporations	Mantilla, G	International norm dynamics; interest-based theories	Political Science	instrumental (critical)	Global Governance	2009
The multinational corporation and social justice: Experiments in supranational governance	McClintock, B.	Social economics, social justice	Economics	instrumental (critical)	Review of Social Economy	1999
Theorization as institutional work: The dynamics of roles and practices	Mena, Sebastien; Suddaby, Roy	Institutional work, sociological institutionalism	Management, Social Science Interdisciplinary	institutional context, instrumental	Human Relations	2016
The convergence of corporate social responsibility practices	Misani, N.	Social institutionalism, strategy	Management	institutional context, instrumental	Management Research Review	2010
Governing sustainable palm oil supply: Disconnects, complementarities, and antagonisms between state regulations and private standards	Pacheco, P; Schoneveld, G; Dermawan, A; Komarudin, H; Djama, M	Transnational regime complex	Law, Political Science	institutional context, instrumental	Regulation & Governance	2020
The institutionalization of private governance: How business and nonprofit organizations agree on transnational rules	Pattberg, P	Interfirm regimes, partnerships, macrotransformation	Political Science	institutional context, instrumental	Governance-An International Journal of Policy and Administration	2005
The role of collaboration in achieving corporate social responsibility objectives	Peloza, John; Falkenberg, Loren	CSR	Business	instrumental	California Management Review	2009
Collective action through voluntary environmental programs: A club theory perspective	Prakash, A., Potoski, M.	Economic institutionalism, club theory	Political Science	instrumental	Policy Studies Journal	2007

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Taming wicked problems: The role of framing in the construction of corporate social responsibility	Reinecke, Juliane; Ansari, Shaz	Political CSR, social movements, framing	Business, Management	institutional context, instrumental	Journal of Management Studies	2016
After Rana Plaza: Building coalitional power for labour rights between unions and (consumption-based) social movement organisations	Reinecke, Juliane; Donaghey, Jimmy	Contentious politics	Business, Management	institutional context, instrumental	Organization	2015
Exercising power in asymmetric relationships: The use of private rules	Rindt, Jekaterina; Mouzas, Stefanos	Power Asymmetry	Business, Management	instrumental	Industrial Marketing Management	2015
Risk management under wraps: self-regulation and the case of food contact plastics	Rothstein, H	Control systems	Social Science Interdisciplinary	instrumental (critical)	Journal of Risk Research	2003
Territorializing effects of global standards: What is at stake in the case of 'sustainable' palm oil?	Ruysschaert, D; Carter, C; Cheyns, E	Territorialisation	Political Science	institutional context, instrumental	Geoforum	2019
Revisiting global governance in multistakeholder initiatives: Club governance based on ideational prealignments	Schneiker, A., Joachim, J.	Club governance	Political Science	institutional context, instrumental	Global Society	2018
Creating legitimacy in global private governance: The case of the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil	Schouten, Greetje; Glasbergen, Pieter	Legitimization processes	Environmental Studies	normative	Ecological Economics	2011
The climatewise principles: Self-regulating climate change risks in the insurance sector	Thistlethwaite, Jason	Economic institutionalism, sociological institutionalism	Business	institutional context, instrumental	Business & Society	2012
Private governance in the supply chain	Thorne, Debbie M.; Quinn, Floyd F.	Supply chain management	Business	instrumental	Journal of Marketing Channels	2016

*Appendix I: Antecedents of company engagement in the creation of private governance:  
A systematic review and research agenda*

Explaining variation in the multiplicity of private social and environmental regulation: a multi-case integration across the coffee, forestry and textile sectors	Turcotte, MF; Reinecke, J; den Hond, F	Economic, idealist, political institutional perspectives	Political Science	institutional context, instrumental	Business and Politics	2014
Private environmental governance	Vandenbergh, M.P.	Economic institutionalism	Law	instrumental (critical)	Cornell Law Review	2013
Private global business regulation	Vogel, David	Civil regulation	Business	institutional context, instrumental	Annual Review of Political Science	2008
The private regulation of global corporate conduct: Achievements and limitations	Vogel, David	Civil regulation	Political Science	institutional context, instrumental	Business & Society	2010
Private governance of human and labor rights in seafood supply chains - The case of the modern slavery crisis in Thailand	Wilhelm, M; Kadfak, A; Bhakoo, V; Skattang, K	Business and human rights	Environmental Studies	instrumental (critical)	Marine Policy	2020
Industry self-regulation: A review and extension to a global setting	Wotruba, TR	Economic institutionalism	Business	instrumental	Journal of Public Policy & Marketing	1997
Global banks, the environment, and human rights: The impact of the equator principles on lending policies and practices	Wright, Christopher	Economic institutionalism, governance	Environmental studies, Political Science	instrumental (critical)	Global Environmental Politics	2012
Greening international shipping through private governance: A case study of the Clean Shipping Project	Wuisan, Lindsey; van Leeuwen, Judith; van Koppen, C. S. A. (Kris)	Institutionalisation	Environmental studies, Political Science	institutional context, instrumental	Marine Policy	2012
Financial industry groups' adaptation to the post-crisis regulatory environment: Changing approaches to the policy cycle	Young, Kevin	Political strategies of firms, policy cycle	Law, Political Science	instrumental	Regulation & Governance	2013



*Appendix 1: Antecedents of company engagement in the creation of private governance:  
A systematic review and research agenda*

Actor and institutional dynamics in the development of multi-stakeholder initiatives	Zeyen, Anica; Beckmann, Markus; Wolters, Stella	Club theory, new institutionalism	Business Ethics	institutional context, instrumental	Journal of Business Ethics	2016
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## **5.2 Appendix 2: Antecedents of company engagement in partnerships for sustainability**

Authors: Maria Riegler, Anna Burton, Markus Scholz, Katharina Jarmai

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**Abstract:** This article refines and expands the debate on antecedents of company engagement in business partnerships for sustainability. It builds upon the Awareness-Motivation-Capability framework and extends it by means of an analysis of an in-depth qualitative study. The article thereby refines the debate by providing a more nuanced account of the underlying elements constituting the main categories to advance a more holistic understanding of the underlying factors influencing company participation in business partnerships for sustainability.

**Keywords:** environmental alliances, partnerships for sustainability, collective environmental entrepreneurship, Awareness-Motivation-Capability framework, sustainability

Addressing so-called grand societal challenges has become a major concern for policy makers, civil society and private actors alike (Seitanidi et al., 2021). The term “grand challenges” refers to issues such as limiting climate change, preventing epidemics, or protecting human rights, all of which are characterized by having a significant effect on human well-being and extending “beyond the boundaries of a single organization or community” (Ferraro, Etzion, & Gehman, 2015, p. 365). Against this backdrop, the past decades have brought an observable rise in collaboration between companies and other companies as well as between companies and civil society and/or governmental bodies in the alleviation of grand challenges (Ferraro et al., 2015; Selsky & Parker, 2005). This has been explained by the unwillingness or inability of governmental actors to address these issues (Clarke & Crane, 2018; Doh et al., 2019), the increased institutional pressures on companies to behave responsibly (Tashman et al., 2021; Vurro et al., 2010), as well as a shift in the strategies of civil society organizations towards exerting direct pressure on companies (Colli & Adriaensen, 2020; Fransen & Burgoon, 2015).

## *Appendix 2: Antecedents of company engagement in partnerships for sustainability*

The extant literature has investigated different forms of collaboration to “*address problems too complex and too protracted to be resolved by unilateral organizational action*” (Gray & Wood, 2016, p. 4). While some authors focus on partnerships between different types of actors using terms such as “cross-sector partnerships” (e.g., Clarke & Fuller, 2010; Selsky & Parker, 2005), “multi-stakeholder partnerships” (e.g., de Bakker et al., 2019) or inter-organizational collaboration (e.g., Sydow & Braun, 2018), others investigate collaborations that take place exclusively or primarily between companies (e.g., “coopetition”, see e.g., Christ et al., 2017 or “strategic environmental alliances”, see e.g., Lin & Darnall, 2015). This article also focuses on the latter, i.e., partnerships for sustainability between companies.

While partnerships have been discussed as one major instrument to address issues associated with sustainable development (exemplified by Sustainable Development Goal 17 “Partnerships for the Goals”, see [globalgoals.org](http://globalgoals.org)) and to address grand challenges, the understanding of why companies engage in these collaborations remains incomplete. What is currently missing in the literature on business partnerships for sustainability are in-depth insights into the antecedents of company engagement in business partnerships for sustainability, i.e., the factors at the individual and organizational level that lead companies to engage in such partnerships.

The lack of a thorough understanding of what drives companies to engage in these partnerships is not only a gap in the literature, but it also makes it difficult for policy makers to set the right conditions to foster company engagement in partnerships aiming for a positive societal impact. Against this backdrop, the general objective of this article is to explore antecedents of business engagement in business partnerships for sustainability, i.e., collaborative activities *between companies* to address concrete social or environmental issues (Christ et al., 2017; McDonald & Young, 2012). In our article, we build on the definition provided by Niesten and Jolink (2020) and define business partnerships for sustainability as

voluntary collaborative arrangements between firms and (optionally) additional stakeholders with the aim to exchange or co-develop knowledge to create economic as well as social and/or environmental value. Moreover, we strongly build on Stadtler and Lin (2017) who have proposed transferring the Awareness-Motivation-Capability framework, originally conceptualized for studying competitor analysis and interfirm rivalry, to the study of interfirm alliances. In their quantitative study, they identify important awareness, motivation, and capability factors influencing company engagement in sustainable-development oriented alliances. We contribute to the literature and to theory-building by synthesizing the findings of Niesten and Jolink (2020) and extending Stadtler and Lin's (2017) proposed framework through a qualitative in-depth analysis of company engagement in business partnerships for sustainability, particularly focusing on drivers in the "motivation" category and on micro-level aspects. Our research aims to explore the following research questions: (1) What are the antecedents at the individual and organizational level of company engagement in business partnerships for sustainability? (2) Building on this, how can the Awareness-Motivation-Capability framework be advanced to provide a more nuanced understanding of company engagement?

By answering these questions, informed by our analysis, we suggest a refinement and an extension of Stadtler and Lin's (2017) framework. We provide more nuanced insights into some of the existing parts of the framework in order to advance the understanding of the mechanisms and context underlying company engagement in business partnerships for sustainability.

This article is structured as follows: Section 1 provides an overview of the extant literature dealing with business partnerships for sustainability and identifies current research gaps. Section 2 describes our methodological approach. Section 3 presents our findings regarding awareness, motivation, and capability factors at the organizational level. Section 4

discusses these findings in the context of the extant literature as well as the implications of our findings for research.

## **COMPANY ENGAGEMENT IN PARTNERSHIPS FOR SUSTAINABILITY**

In the current article, we focus on partnerships *between companies* with a *focus on environmental and/or social objectives*. This field of research is generally rooted in two different research streams, with corporate social responsibility (CSR) and business sustainability scholarship on the one hand (e.g., de Bakker et al., 2019; Wickert et al., 2016) and strategic alliances research on the other hand (e.g. Artz & Brush, 2000; Chen et al., 2007; Luo & Deng, 2009). The line of research originating from CSR and business sustainability research attempts to shed light on how companies can help to address relevant social and environmental issues (Bowen et al., 2018; Doh et al., 2019). Drawing from strategic alliances research, a stream of research on strategic environmental alliances and cooperation for sustainability has emerged (Christ et al., 2017; Manzhynski & Figge, 2020; Stadler & Van Wassenhove, 2016). This literature largely follows an instrumental perspective and investigates the potential business benefits and risks associated with company engagement in partnerships as well as its impact on business competitiveness (Christ et al., 2017; Lin & Darnall, 2015).

With regard to the question of what motivates company engagement in partnerships, Niesten and Jolink (2020) conducted a systematic review of the literature on environmental alliances (i.e., partnerships between companies focusing on addressing environmental issues), building on multiple theoretical perspectives. They suggest that companies may be motivated to generate environmental value (i.e., positive effects on the environment) or knowledge value (i.e., innovations in environmental technologies that create knowledge spillover to other firms and society at large) to share resources, to reduce sustainability risk, to respond to stakeholder pressure, or to invest in assets required in order to offer sustainable products. They further argue that companies additionally may have a self-interested motivation to engage in alliances to

increase competitive advantage, enhance their reputation and legitimacy, or to reduce transaction cost.

Lin and Darnall (2015) build on the literature on strategic alliances (e.g. Artz & Brush, 2000; Das & Teng, 2001) to explore why and how companies collaborate with each other to address complex environmental problems. They identify two resource-based motivations: (1) combining complementary resources, e.g., in the form of knowledge and access to decision makers; and (2) increasing organizational learning. Both of these motivations are connected to the dual goal of addressing environmental problems and gaining a competitive advantage. In addition, drawing from institutional theory, the authors argue that companies may also form strategic alliances in reaction to institutional pressures (such as regulatory pressure, industry norms or pressure from community constituents) in an effort to preserve their legitimacy (Lin & Darnall, 2015).

Most relevant for our article, Stadtler and Lin (2017), building on Chen's (1996) Awareness-Motivation-Capability perspective, investigate the drivers for company engagement in sustainable-development oriented (rather than pollution-prevention) partnerships in a quantitative study. As Chen (1996) synthesizes the literature on organizational learning, change, and decision-making, he identifies awareness, motivation and capability as the three essential factors underlying organizational action: "the *awareness* of interfirm relationships and action implications, the *motivation* to act, and the *capability* of taking action" (Chen, 1996, p. 105). While the Awareness-Motivation-Capability perspective was originally conceptualized for analyzing competitive strategies and competitive tension (Chen, 1996; Chen et al., 2007), Stadtler and Lin (2017) suggest that it could be adapted and used to understand company engagement in partnerships for sustainability. Thus, in their paper, they analyze different awareness, motivation, and capability factors that may influence company engagement in sustainable-development oriented partnerships.

*Appendix 2: Antecedents of company engagement in partnerships for sustainability*

In the *awareness category*, Stadtler and Lin (2017) focus on regulatory pressure, i.e., existing environmental regulations, and access to environmental networks. While they find that businesses with better access to environmental networks are more likely to engage, they find that regulatory pressure on its own is not sufficient as a driver for company engagement in sustainable development-oriented partnerships.

In the *motivation category*, Stadtler and Lin (2017) further define the company's competitive environment (operationalized as industry concentration, indicating that companies in less concentrated industries may have better opportunities to follow a differentiation strategy) as well as the company's estimated risk-taking propensity as motivation factors. Risk-taking propensity is suggested to motivate more risk-affine businesses to be more inclined to join partnerships for sustainability, relative to their more risk-averse counterparts. In their framework, both industry concentration and the companies' risk-taking propensity are significant, indicating that risk-seeking firms that are operating in less concentrated industries are more likely to engage in sustainable development-oriented alliances.

Regarding the *capability category*, Stadtler and Lin (2017) focus on firms' prior experience with cross-sector partnerships as well as firms' financial capacity. While the results for firms' financial capacity were mixed, firms' prior experience with cross-sector partnerships was a significant factor for company engagement in sustainable-development oriented alliances.

While Stadtler and Lin (2017) provide the groundwork for an understanding of the antecedents of why companies engage in partnerships for sustainability with their quantitative analysis, what is missing so far is an in-depth insight into the circumstances under which

companies engage in such partnerships and into motivational factors at the organizational and individual levels.<sup>3</sup>

We use Stadtler and Lin's (2017) framework as a basis for investigating the antecedents of company engagement in business partnerships for sustainability in further detail. Through our qualitative in-depth analysis, we provide important insights into the overarching awareness-motivation-capability factors as well as the individual level. In addition, we were able to synthesize the main findings derived from the systematic literature review conducted by Niesten and Jolink (2020) into the Awareness-Motivation-Capability framework. In the following section, we will detail our methodological approach that guided our analysis.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In this article, we follow a qualitative approach towards exploring antecedents of company engagement in business partnerships for sustainability. Primary data was collected in two rounds between July 2020 and May 2021 through semi-structured interviews with 20 representatives of Austrian companies engaged in at least one business partnership for sustainability. To complement information from these interviews, publicly available information (e.g., from websites, reports, and press releases) about the respective partnerships was collected via internet search and screened for appropriateness in parallel.

In order to acquire businesses as interviewees for this research study, an initial online screening of companies engaged in sustainability initiatives was conducted. In this initial step, a total of 89 businesses were identified by following a selective and purposive sample technique, similar to the one utilized in Crossley et al. (2021). As suggested by Crossley et al. (2021), the initial sample was narrowed down to companies relevant to the research at hand.

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<sup>3</sup> In their "Future Research" section, Stadtler and Lin (2017) themselves suggest that "[f]uture studies can complement this view by analyzing the [awareness, motivation, and/or capability] factors in greater depth through qualitative research.



## *Appendix 2: Antecedents of company engagement in partnerships for sustainability*

Companies were considered relevant if they fulfilled the following criteria: 1) active involvement in a sustainability partnership with at least one other company; 2) social or ecological primary focus of the respective partnership; 3) partnership set-up reaching beyond a purely transactional collaboration. Individual interviewees were selected according to their knowledge about the sustainability partnership as well as about the overall company strategy.

A semi-structured interview guideline was developed to explore the company context, its situation at the time of engagement in a particular business partnership for sustainability, influential factors deemed relevant by the interviewee and decisive factors leading up to engagement. All questions were open ended, and the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.<sup>4</sup>

The companies represented by our interviewees vary substantially in size, having between eight and 50,000 employees. About half of them (55%) are small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), while the other half represent large companies (45%), some of which operate in locations worldwide. The companies were founded between 1550 and 2017, and include highly traditional family businesses as well as startups. As suggested also in Crossley et al. (2021), for its findings, this paper makes no discrimination in terms of business size or category, in an effort to illustrate the rich and diverse nature of antecedents to participating in social and environmental partnerships across a wide range of businesses. The interviewees were able and willing to share their observations and thoughts about developments, actions, contextual factors, and decisions that led to their companies' engagement in a particular partnership.

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<sup>4</sup> One interviewee refused a recording due to company policy; detailed notes were taken for this interview.

*---- Table 1 Interviewees about here ----*

As outlined in Donner and Vries (2021), we identified relevant interview sections through inductive coding. The coding was conducted by two researchers independently and a discussion was held if disagreements arose until a consensus was found. The material was condensed into core concepts by paraphrasing and summarizing. The relevant sections were further investigated by means of manual elaborative coding based on Spence and Rinaldi (2014; also see Lai et al., 2019). The framework proposed by Stadler and Lin (2017) concerning firms' awareness, motivation and capability drivers in environmental alliances was used as a loose guiding lens to structure the collected data themes (for a similar methodological approach see Spence & Rinaldi, 2014). Thereby, every effort was taken to ensure that the reading of the data allowed for other aspects to emerge beyond those prescribed elements, or for the possibility that no data related meaningfully to any given categories (Spence & Rinaldi, 2014). We were able to advance the framework proposed by Stadler and Lin (2017) by identifying relevant text, repeated ideas, and themes in our data, which provided the fabric of the theoretical narrative presented below. The category of contextual factors was made based on interview data: it contains those factors that were explicitly named by interviewees as relevant contextual factors that facilitated company engagement in a partnership but were not perceived as a main driving force.

## **FINDINGS**

In the following section, we present our empirical insights into the antecedents of company engagement in partnerships for sustainability in an attempt to refine and advance the Awareness-Motivation-Capability framework suggested by Stadler and Lin (2017). In Stadler and Lin's (2017) framework, the awareness category includes businesses' general awareness of certain social and environmental issues, as well as the awareness of potential avenues to address those issues. The authors describe the motivation category as organizational drivers to seize

*Appendix 2: Antecedents of company engagement in partnerships for sustainability*

strategic development opportunities, when these enable firms to gain competitive advantages in the market, and/or advance business objectives. The third category, i.e., the capability factors, relates to businesses' capabilities to engage in partnerships for sustainability in terms of experience and financial capacity.

Building on the three categories identified by Stadtler and Lin (2017) — awareness, motivation and capability factors — and our own qualitative research, we provide a more detailed analysis of the elements constituting each factor. After this, we sketch potential contextual factors influencing the level of business engagement in partnerships for sustainability as indicated in our interview data. Table 4

---- *Table 2 Antecedents of company engagement in partnerships for sustainability*

*about here ----*

### **Awareness Factors**

In their framework, Stadtler and Lin (2017) combine companies' awareness of social and ecological issues as well as awareness of potential avenues to address these issues into the "awareness" category. The authors list regulatory pressure and access to environmental networks as awareness factors. In contrast to this, our collected data allows us to distinguish three categories of awareness factors — (1) *access to environmental and social networks*; (2) *regulatory pressure and regulatory voids*; (3) *stakeholder pressure* — in the context of company engagement with a business partnership for sustainability. In what follows, we introduce the identified factors one-by-one.

### ***Access to Environmental and Social Networks***

Organizational connections to environmental and social networks not only increase the awareness of environmental issues but may also provide information on potential solution strategies and engagement avenues. This factor does not necessitate membership within these networks, but rather is based on the awareness of and access to networks dealing with

*Appendix 2: Antecedents of company engagement in partnerships for sustainability*

sustainability issues and advancing potential mitigation and adaptation strategies. This means that companies with better access to environmental and social networks may be more aware of emerging trends, challenges, and opportunities related to sustainability issues (Boiral, 2006; Sharma, 2000; Sharma and Vredenburg, 1998).

As our interview data suggests, access to environmental and social networks generally stems from either existing business network affiliation and/or personal connections. In some cases, interviewees referred to preexisting relationships at an individual or organizational level that facilitated company engagement in partnerships, often because the participating companies were situated in the same geographic region and their executives had been meeting regularly at various events prior to the formal business partnership establishment (e.g., Business 15, Business 7). One interviewee described this situation in the following way, “*Overall, [our region] is of manageable size, where everyone knows everyone, overstating it a little bit, and that is of course also the case at [the] executive level, and thus various people come together at events, and cooperations are the result of this.*” (Business 09). At the organizational level, access to networks dealing with sustainability issues may be facilitated through events organized by third parties, such as the Chamber of Commerce (Business 10). In addition, conferences may act as a catalyst bringing together a wide range of interested businesses, as described by one of our interviewees: “*the [conference name] is the largest network of this kind that really deals with [the social issue] worldwide. With over 400 member companies [...] it provides wide access.*” (Business 19).

In other cases, (groups of) individuals that were connected at a personal level drove partnership formation. In this regard, one interviewee described how a group of “*three gentlemen [...] grew up together [and] they had been wanting to collaborate for the longest time*” (Business 12). One interviewee described how one business partnership evolved from another larger collaboration that had been established previously (Business 01).

### ***Regulatory Pressure and Regulatory Voids***

The second category of awareness factors for company engagement in partnerships for sustainability focuses on regulation-associated issues from two different perspectives; (1) regulatory pressure emanating from new or emerging regulations regarding social and/or environmental sustainability may force companies to engage, and (2) a (perceived) lack of regulatory action, creating a regulatory gap, may motivate companies to engage in order to fill the regulatory void. Here, we extend the original framework by the second perspective.

Regulatory pressure may be felt by businesses due to already existing regulations, as well as in anticipation of discussed or soon-to-be implemented rules and regulations. Taking this into consideration, the *regulatory pressure* category includes reactive approaches as well as anticipatory behavior to engagement in business partnerships. Reactive approaches may be exhibited by businesses joining organizational partnerships for sustainability in an effort to make use of the established set-up or to benefit from coordinated efforts to fulfill regulatory obligations. Alternatively, anticipatory behavior is generally characterized by corporate actions taken prior to a regulation implementation (i.e., in anticipation) of soon-to-be introduced measures, which can already be adopted through participation in business partnerships for sustainability. In addition, interviewees emphasized that not only are regulations at the national level relevant to them, but also statutes at the supra-national (i.e., the E.U.) or international realm have to be accounted for (e.g., Business 01).

On the other hand, governance gaps were perceived as another important aspect within the socio-political context of business partnerships. Interviewees referred to a perceived gap in regulation that they felt business partnerships had to fill. One interviewee spoke in a rather general manner about “*tasks that should be taken over by communities, municipalities or a tourism association, but they don’t perform this task, and companies do it for them*” (Business 05). Another interviewee provided a specific example: “[in my region] *there are some*

*bottlenecks with a lot of traffic every day, with many thousands of passenger cars, and all companies are affected by this [...] and policy-making reacts rather sluggishly to such issues [...] [so] companies have decided to take this into their own hands and to start building up pressure.” (Business 09).*

### ***Stakeholder Pressure***

In addition to regulatory pressures, external pressure in the form of *public pressure* or *demands made by external supporters* was described by our interviewees as contributing to an increased awareness among company representatives regarding both social or environmental issues and business partnerships as a potential instrument to address them.

Interviewees described a range of factors concerning societal dynamics and public pressures encouraging their business to participate in collaborations for sustainability (e.g. Business 07, Business 13). Social movements, such as the international climate movement *FridaysForFuture* (Business 17), and campaigns by civil society organizations (Business 04) may increase awareness of certain social or environmental sustainability issues among companies as well as among external stakeholders such as the media, political decision-makers, etc. (e.g., Business 08).

Sustainability issues that are high on relevant stakeholders’ (e.g., customers, investors, potential employees) agendas may be perceived by company management as particularly relevant. As an example, one interviewee mentioned young employees’ expectations on their employers’ sustainability engagement (Business 09). Another employee highlighted increased investor pressure regarding the topic of biodiversity, “*because it is another one of these issues where pressure is increasing; well, not really for companies in Austria, I think, but in London [at the stock exchange], we are questioned on this topic: what do you provide regarding biodiversity, are you exposed, what is your role in this context?*” (Business 13).

Stakeholder pressure may also be initiated from external individuals influencing company engagement in business partnerships; interviewees talked about individuals that instigated conversation about certain sustainability topics that were important across companies or connected companies on a certain topic. In this context, interviewees referred to key outside individuals such as consultants, sustainability experts, or politicians, who brought companies together, arranged meetings, started conversations regarding sustainability topics, or facilitated partnership formation. In one example, a local politician “*arranged [...] meeting[s] in a different company every month*” (Business 10).

### **Capability Factors**

The second overarching group of factors constitute capability factors, which relate to businesses’ capabilities to manage and engage in partnerships for sustainability. According to Stadtler and Lin (2017), this category comprises the company’s financial capacity and prior experience with cross-sector partnerships. Building on this, we identified two subthemes of capability factors in our data, grouping them as *resource capacity* (an extension of the “financial capacity” factor) and *partnership experience* (an extension of the “cross-sector experience” factor).

#### ***Resource Capacity***

In line with the extant literature (e.g., Stadtler & Lin, 2017), we found that a company’s financial means are a decisive factor for company engagement in a particular initiative. However, we suggest it may be useful to expand the “financial capacity” aspect into a more general “resource capacity” aspect that also includes resources such as staff, knowledge, and infrastructure. In addition to this, and in contrast to earlier articles (e.g., Stadtler & Lin, 2017), our data suggests that resource capacity may require a more nuanced understanding. On the one hand, as the extant literature shows (e.g., Bernstein & Cashore, 2007; Dashwood, 2014), larger

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companies that have more resources to spare are more likely to engage in partnerships because they can afford the costs of engagement (membership fees, personnel cost, etc.) more easily.

On the other hand, and in contrast to Stadtler and Lin (2017), we also found that low resource capacity may also drive certain companies towards engaging in partnerships. As our data suggests, a perceived lack of company resources for fulfilling sustainability goals individually and pooling resources for greater leverage is the rationale behind engaging in partnerships for certain smaller companies. Companies may engage in partnerships for sustainability to make up for a lack of resources, both in terms of knowledge and financial capabilities. Interviewees referred to the pooling of resources in some cases and complementing diverse capabilities in other cases. Interviewees argued that dealing with issues related to social or environmental sustainability is “*nobody’s core competence*” (Business 11) and companies would therefore benefit from “*helping each other out*” (Business 15).

As reported by some interviewees, companies joined or formed partnerships because they expected to significantly increase their problem-solving capacities by collaborating with other companies and because they believed that the particular challenge at hand could be addressed most effectively collectively. Collaborative problem-solving was considered “*resource-friendly*” (Business 09), or, as another interviewee put it, “*It saves me a lot of energy.*” (Business 12). One aspect emphasized in this context was the lack of knowledge, or the inability to build up the necessary knowledge on the part of the individual companies. Participation in a business partnership was described as an opportunity to collaborate with experts in order to gain access to new knowledge and skills or to exchange valuable first-hand experiences and information on topics. One interviewee explained this aspect in the following way: “[It is] *a challenge for all [partner companies] to face this issue, because hardly any company has specialists in the area [...]. These are problems that all companies have. And*



*basically each one has some kind of solution. And in this area, there was a joining of forces to collectively evaluate these solutions and find a better solution overall.”* (Business 11).

### ***Partnership Experience***

Previous experience in partnerships for sustainability, both in terms of cross-sector partnerships and business partnerships, was found to be an additional major capability factor. Importantly, partnership experience differs from mere access to sustainability networks, to the extent that experience necessitates previous partnership engagement, rather than the mere awareness of such partnerships. Partnership experience may be held by an individual in the company, who has gained collaboration experience through previous business partnerships, as described by our interviewees: *“I have known [the collaboration partner] for a long time. We have already worked together on other projects.”* (Business 18). In this quoted example, the interviewee even had prior partnership experience with the exact same partner, which may be seen as a specialized type of prior partnership experience. Alternatively, experience in collaboration projects for sustainable objectives may also be gained from the previous engagement in partnerships at the organizational level, as described by an interviewee: *“we have a long history of alliances with other companies”* (Business 06). This generally facilitates the collaborative process and fosters the business partnership’s success.

### **Motivation Factors**

Stadtler and Lin (2017) present two motivation factors, namely industry concentration and a company’s risk-taking approach. Building on this and expanding the framework, we grouped motivation factors identified in our data into two sub-categories — *industry-related motivation and company-related motivation* — to reflect motivation factors arising on various levels. The industry-level motivation category has been further divided into two sub-themes, namely *industry concentration*, reflecting motivational elements relating to competition between

companies, and *industry collaboration*, representing motivational elements derived from business cooperation.

***Industry-Related Motivation: Industry Concentration***

The industry concentration category generally deals with the motivational factors that concern *communication-related objectives*, as well as the level of *competitor or affiliate participation* in sustainability initiatives. Given that the motivational basis in this category is competition, partnership for sustainability is used as a means of differentiation in the market.

*Reputation & Communication.* As our data suggests, communication targets were a relevant driver for company engagement in business partnerships for sustainability. On the one hand, partnerships may help companies communicate about their general engagement towards sustainability. Interviewees argued that business partnerships enabled companies to communicate their sustainability efforts and thus make the companies' efforts more comprehensible and transparent for external parties. *"In connection with the fact that we have a lead role, as a public business, the [business partnership] allows us to transport this in a very simple way and [also allows us] to present the goals we have set for ourselves in a quantifiable manner."* (Business 18). On the other hand, purely instrumental rationales may also play a role in company engagement in business partnerships. Interviewees emphasized that their engagement in a partnership was motivated by the partnership's capacity to support a company's overall business strategy. One interviewee, for example, emphasized the partnership's utility in raising the company's profile among customers as a green service provider (Business 2). Thereby, the participation in the partnership was instrumentalized, which thus highlights the fact that partnerships can be beneficial for companies for reasons other than the overarching partnership goal. One interviewee, for example, stated that it is *"obviously good when we can communicate that leading businesses in Austria are actively involved in the topic"* (Business 13), while another described that the collaboration *"is a good thing also for the*

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*company's image. Nowadays it is great when you can increase your company's awareness by doing good.*" (Business 18). Instrumentalizing the "*doing good things and talking about them*" (Business 18) mentality was also mentioned as beneficial for "*increasing visibility and employer branding*" (Business 19).

*Industry Competitiveness.* The second aspect identified in relation to industry concentration concerns the level of competitiveness in the industry and to what extent competitors or affiliated businesses, such as suppliers, participate in collaborations for sustainability. One interviewee from a B2B business described the prevalent industry dynamic as supportive in the decision to participate in the business partnership by outlining that "*a reason why this was so attractive to us, was that there were many of our customers, suppliers, but also competitors there [members of the partnerships]. Of course, we wanted to be there too.*" (Business 7).

### ***Industry-Related Motivation: Industry Collaboration***

Company engagement in partnerships for sustainability is not only influenced by the level of competition within an industry, but also by the perceived level of benefits derived from collaborative action at the industry level. In our research, we identified *sharing common goals and problems, knowledge sharing and support*, and the *creation of political pressure* as explicit motivators at the industry level.

*Common Goals & Problems.* Interviewees described particular partnership goals and effects that they attributed to the collective approach of problem solving inherent to partnerships. Some interviewees mentioned particular topics about which they wished to exchange ideas with other businesses. These included waste reduction (e.g., Business 01), climate neutrality (e.g., Business 07), mobility concepts (e.g., Business 11), or topics in the areas of human resources and marketing (e.g., Business 16). Other interviewees were interested in an exchange with companies facing similar circumstances or problems in a more general

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context. One interviewee explained that “[in their region] *there are some bottlenecks with a lot of traffic every day, with many thousands of passenger cars, and all companies are affected by this*” (Business 09). Another explained that “*we see [participation in the partnership] mainly as an exchange of experiences and hope that other companies from [the same sector] will also participate who have similar problems. Because right now we don’t really know how to deal with [this sustainability challenge].*” (Business 13). A third interviewee concluded that a group of companies within a specific geographic region founded a partnership “*because the problem, the challenge, in the area of human resources was very similar*” (Business 03).

*Sharing Knowledge.* Related to the aforementioned aspect of tackling similar problems, several interviewees expressed motivation to support each other and facilitate the exchange of knowledge through a business partnership. One interviewee explained that a particular mindset on the part of the participating individuals was conditional for the engagement in a business partnership, stating that “[a] *mindset of trust, transparency, sharing knowledge, building up knowledge [is required]; because only then will cooperation work*” (Business 16). The same interviewee emphasized how collaboration requires all partners’ willingness to engage with others, share knowledge, and participate actively.

*Creating Political Pressure.* Interviewees voiced a range of aims and expectations that we have summed up under the category “creating political pressure”. With regard to political pressure, a group of companies — depending on their size and the influence of specific members — will “*have greater weight*” (Business 11) than individual companies. As emphasized by our interviewees, a group with a certain number of members can exert pressure on policy makers where a single company or smaller group would not be heard. As emphasized by one interviewee: “*When you say, we are a group, we represent 200 SMEs [Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises], and we have this problem, suddenly we are being heard*” (Business 10). Another interviewee recounted a specific example: “*If I approach [the local public*

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transport company] *and tell them that I need a train at 5 o'clock, because my shifts change at five, it will have less weight than when all companies approach [the local public transport company] and say, we need this train, our shifts change at five.*" (Business 11). Other statements emphasized the fact that the influence or reputation of single companies can increase a partnership's intervening power. When leading or well-known companies join an initiative, it helps to communicate the importance of the issue at hand. As one interviewee put it, *"of course it will have broader impact if a few more well-known companies join"* (Business 17).

In this context, interviewees also emphasized that they expect partnerships with a large number of heterogeneous companies to generate a higher impact than efforts by a single company or even a small, homogeneous group of companies. One interviewee explained this the following way: *"They have a much broader base and can affect much more, that is our goal as well, our goal is always [to] do more, because climate change advances. We have to make a difference and the more broadly positioned [the partnership is, the better] ... by yourself, you will definitely lose, the more the better"* (Business 02).

### ***Company-Related Motivation Factors***

In an attempt to expand Stadtler and Lin's (2017) original framework, we have clustered a second group of motivational factors identified in our data analysis into the company-related motivation category. These motivational factors manifest in two distinct forms: 1) motivational elements at the individual level (i.e., at the level of employees or managers), and 2) motivational factors at the organizational level, highlighted in a company's mission to create a positive societal impact and to increase the public reach of the sustainability partnership in question.

*Employee & management motivation.* We found that individual employees may be highly influential regarding company engagement in a sustainable partnership. Our interviewees, for example, credited colleagues with establishing contact with potential partner companies or setting up a particular sustainability action through which the company came to

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join a business partnership. Still other interviewees reflected their own role in their company's engagement with a partnership for sustainability. Reasons ranged from trying *“to make a difference in my sphere of influence”* (Business 18) to *“a love for cooperation and collective implementation of projects”* (Business 12).

Related to the factor of employee motivation, interviewees also described personal efforts of CEOs, directors and board members towards company engagement in partnerships. One interviewee explained how certain sustainability issues were a *“big concern”* for the company's CEO, which *“he pushed”* (Business 08). Another explained the beginnings of a particular partnership in the following way: *“personally [the company CEO], who is very [...] interested in the topic of mobility and sustainability [...] was the initiator of the whole thing”* (Business 09). Others emphasized the role of members of the board or company management in spreading information about sustainability issues in existing business networks and acting as facilitators between companies. One interviewee highlighted their CEO's efforts *“to further connect the various actors”* (Business 08), while another recounted how a managing partner had listened to the talk of a renowned expert on climate change and *“carried it into the companies”* (Business 15). Thereby, it became evident that intrinsically motivated individuals can be strong drivers when it comes to engaging in partnerships for sustainability.

*Common good.* According to our data, the desire to generate a positive environmental and/or social impact is an additional decisive factor for company engagement in business partnerships for sustainability. In some cases, the desire to generate a social or environmental impact was linked to a very concrete social or environmental issue or a specific region, while in other cases it was linked to a more abstract sense of generating environmental or social benefits in general. Interviewees expressed strong convictions about the importance of tackling sustainability issues and one of them even emphasized how they *“know that it has to hurt a little”* (Business 07) to reach sustainability goals.

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This motivation can be explained either by a conviction about corporate responsibility in general or by a strong belief in the goals and contents of a partnership in particular. One interviewee described the company's CEO's conviction coming "*from an inner drive to improve things in the world, and also, as [the CEO] always said, leaving his children with a company that stands on healthy feet*" (Business 16). Another interviewee emphasized how they were "*very convinced*" (Business 07) about the partnership objective and continued to state their conviction that "*everyone who is [engaged in the partnership] has understood the idea anyway. You don't have to explain that to them, we know that we are climate-neutral because we have to protect the climate, we know that it has to hurt a little that we have to cut emissions.*" (Business 07).

*Increasing reach.* Increasing reach and awareness about sustainability issues or a particular business partnership was mentioned as a motivational factor by our interviewees. One interviewee, for example, stated that "*our company has over 100 [...] centers, which is a very large infrastructure. But in total, in the [partnership] we have around 500 centers, which means that it simply allows us [...] to [work] at a completely different scale*" (Business 06). Another interviewee emphasized that the partnership allowed them to create a "*critical mass*" (Business 14) and synergies with other companies. In addition, interviewees voiced expectations about effects beyond the partnership itself: a successful partnership for sustainability may be able to set an example for other companies or even exert influence on society at large regarding sustainability. Interviewees mentioned aims such as "*encouraging others*" (Business 18) or "*generating a certain dynamic in society*" (Business 13).

### **Contextual Factors**

In addition to the identified main awareness, motivation and capability factors in Stadler and Lin's (2017) original framework, we were also able to identify certain contextual factors based on explicit statements made by our interviewees, which (on their own) do not determine

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company engagement in partnerships, but which may facilitate a company's tendency to join a partnership for sustainability.

*Company values.* Interviewees touched upon company values to explain their respective companies' general predispositions for cooperation in terms of business partnerships for sustainability. These included a general capacity for cooperation, risk-taking propensity, and a high level of interest in sustainability within the company. Our interview data further suggests that companies' proactive engagement with sustainability issues in general is relevant for their decision to engage in partnerships and thereby may help explain various levels of engagement. As reported in the interviews, some companies have a history of investing in sustainability initiatives dating back years before societal and political pressure had risen, while others are only recently engaging with sustainability issues for which societal pressure has been prevalent for years. In this regard, one interviewee explained the company's engagement in a particular business partnership by stating, "*we've been [a] sustainable [business] for generations. And [...] when the European targets come — CO<sub>2</sub>-neutral production by 2030, 2040, 2050 — I can only laugh because we have been [CO<sub>2</sub>-neutral] for a long time, for many years*" (Business 10).

*Temporal context.* From our interview data, the temporal context was identified as another contextual factor influencing a company's decision to engage in partnerships for sustainability. One interviewee, for example, speculated that ten years earlier, their business partnership would not have been possible because the "*time had not yet come*" (Business 14); and went on to explain that the topic had recently gained momentum due to international agreements, the current national government, and recent societal developments. Another described how societal and political developments in the previous years had influenced the company's approach to a particular sustainability issue and observed that "*things suddenly are possible that would not have been possible before*" (Business 13). Another interviewee highlighted the conducive effects of the grassroots movement *FridaysforFuture* on the one hand



and the local municipality's growing ambition to implement high levels of climate protection measures on the other, stating "*One could argue about the usefulness of FridaysForFuture, but it has definitely raised attention, hasn't it? [...] And on the other hand, this development, within the municipality [...] to improve, because they don't want to [lose their reputation as climate protectors they have established for themselves]*" (Business 17).

*Geographical context.* Finally, our data suggests that the geographical and regional context plays a facilitating role in the decision for businesses to collaborate in tackling sustainability issues. Multiple interviewees emphasized that companies in business partnerships were based in the same geographical region, significantly easing the collaborative process and providing mutual understanding for common problems in familiar settings. One interviewee further argued that the region's geographical features supported social cohesion and collective action practices: "*Due to our geographical situation [...] we have limited possibilities to grow, in terms of land surface area [...] this forms a certain cohesion, when we try to address issues together*" (Business 16).

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

Given the article's intent to build on and expand the debate on antecedents of company engagement in business partnerships for sustainability, we have contributed to the literature through a qualitative in-depth analysis of company engagement in partnerships. By acknowledging the findings of Niesten and Jolink (2020) and extending Stadtler and Lin's (2017) proposed Awareness-Motivation-Capability framework, our research increases the understanding of prevalent antecedents of company engagement in business partnerships for sustainability, particularly expanding on elements in the "motivation" category and on micro-level aspects. Based on our research findings, we are able to extend the presented Awareness-Motivation-Capability framework and provide a more nuanced account of the underlying elements constituting the main categories to advance a more holistic understanding of the

underlying factors influencing company participation in business partnerships for sustainability.

With regards to *awareness factors*, our data not only qualitatively underwrites the proposed awareness elements, namely *access to sustainability networks* and *regulatory pressure* (Stadtler & Lin, 2017), but also supports the introduction of *stakeholder pressure* as an additional underlying awareness category. As indicated in our findings section, external pressure may be exerted by associated stakeholders, the general public, or customer groups in an effort to stimulate company involvement in partnerships for sustainable objectives. This confirms findings derived in the systematic literature review conducted by Niesten and Jolink (2020), arguing that businesses are inclined to participate in partnerships for sustainability due to stakeholder pressure. In addition, we conceptually advanced the awareness factor *regulatory pressure* to take into consideration not only the pressure exerted by implemented or soon-to-be established rules and regulations as suggested by Stadtler and Lin (2017), but also to account for perceived regulatory gaps leading companies to engage in business partnerships. In these instances, we argue that awareness is created not through regulatory pressure but through company representatives experiencing — or “sensing” (Teece, 2007) — environmental or social issues within their sphere of influence.

Our data advances the *capability factors* suggested by Stadtler and Lin (2017) by cultivating the underlying elements, namely *financial capacity* and *cross-sector experience*. Through our qualitative analysis, we were able not only to discern a company’s financial capacity as instrumental in the decision to participate in partnerships for sustainability, but also to add the nuance of a potentially lacking knowledge capacity. Thus, we renamed the factor *financial capacity* to *resource capacity*. We also found that a company’s resource capacity may work bidirectionally depending on context: While the extant literature mostly argues that larger companies with ample resources may be more likely to engage in partnerships (Bernstein &

Cashore, 2007; Campbell, 2007; Dashwood, 2014), we found that smaller companies may also engage in partnerships to compensate for a lack of resources by sharing costs and investments (Gulati, 1998; Niesten & Jolink, 2020). This finding is in line with resource-based approaches towards explaining company engagement in partnerships: According to the resource-based view, partnering with others may be a fast and relatively low-risk option to obtain access to necessary resources (Lin & Darnall, 2015; Parmigiani & Rivera-Santos, 2011; Tashman et al., 2021).

We also advanced the category of *cross-sector experience* put forward by Stadtler and Lin (2017) to not only account for organizational-level partnership history, but also consider prior experience at the individual level. The level of partnership experience by key individuals within organizations is arguably valuable to estimating a company's capacity to engage in business partnerships, since their individual experience is important not only for themselves as individuals, but also for the companies they represent.

The third category of factors proposed in Stadtler and Lin's (2017) Awareness-Motivation-Capability framework could be enhanced substantially through our analysis. Our data not only supported the motivational factor of *industry concentration*, but also added a new industry-level motivator, *industry collaboration*, as well as an overarching motivation factor category on the organizational level, *company-related motivation*.

Furthermore, we were able to strengthen the element of *industry concentration* by data indicating motivational value for companies in speaking out about their engagement in partnerships for sustainability to differentiate from other businesses in the market to enhance their reputation and legitimacy, as argued for by Niesten and Jolink (2020). On the other hand, our data also suggests that "laggard" businesses may be motivated to participate in partnerships when competitors or associated businesses are already part of a sustainability partnership, in an effort not to be left behind.

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*Industry collaboration* was added to the Awareness-Motivation-Capability framework (Stadtler & Lin, 2017, building on Chen, 1996) as a motivational factor to account for instances where businesses are motivated to join sustainability partnerships due to benefits resulting from collaboration, such as sharing knowledge, solving problems collectively, and creating political pressure. Acknowledging the fact that Stadtler and Lin's (2017) framework accounted for potential knowledge exchange and sharing complementary resources, our data supports findings from Niesten & Jolink (2020) that these are not merely awareness factors but constitute true motivators leading businesses to participate in partnerships for sustainability. We find support for the idea that companies do not merely operate competitively, intending to gain a competitive advantage through business operations, but understand that collaborative acts may be more fruitful in certain settings, which supports and contributes to the emerging literature on “coopetition for sustainability” (Christ et al., 2017; Manzhynski & Figge, 2020).

Given the prevalence of motivational factors named by our interviewees that relate to individuals within a particular company, as well as overarching business goals, we added *company-related motivation* as this element did not seem to be reflected in the original framework. This category accounts for personal motivations held by employees and management within the company who drive the business to engage in partnerships for sustainability. The category of business motivations also includes the mentioned motivator of increasing reach through partnerships to gain access to a larger audience to either push business objectives or increase the awareness of the sustainability partnership's goals. Additionally, at a more abstract level, contributing to the common good and generating social impact was seen as a motivating factor for many to participate in sustainable partnerships.

Building on these categories, we have identified multiple contextual factors that extend the existing Awareness-Motivation-Capability framework (Stadtler & Lin, 2017) and help understand different levels of company engagement with partnerships for sustainability. Our

analysis indicates that *temporal* and *geographical context* act as external facilitators. The identified contextual factors generally increase or decrease a company's propensity to engage in a partnership for sustainability depending on the factors' prevalence levels. This being said, our data suggests that the perceived temporal appropriateness of participation in partnerships for sustainability, as well as the perceived regional fit between the business's geographic sphere and the partnership's objectives, may influence the organization's propensity to engage in partnerships.

Additionally, in line with Stadtler and Lin's (2017) framework, we also identified the importance of a business's risk-taking propensity as an influencing factor for a company's decision to participate in partnerships for sustainability. Our data suggests however that risk-taking propensity and the associated *business culture* should be regarded as a contextual factor, facilitating rather than deciding a company's tendency to collaborate depending on the perceived fit between business objectives and partnership goals.

Through our investigation, we are able to advance the understanding of the underlying elements and gain in-depth insights into their nature. Given the qualitative methodology of our analysis, causal or statistical inferences concerning the factor relationships are generally not possible, but our research findings may help provide an interpretative basis to understanding the social context of company engagement in sustainability partnerships (Jabareen, 2009).

### **Limitations and Further Research**

Our selected research approach allowed us to gather insights into antecedents of company engagement in business partnerships for sustainability. While generalizability of the findings is limited by the qualitative nature of the study, it allowed us to develop a detailed picture of awareness, motivation, and capability factors at the individual and organizational level, as well as to incorporate contextual elements based on interviewee perceptions and observations. In

addition, this study is the first to investigate any of these factors in more detail and describe their nature in extensive depth utilizing qualitative research methods.

Future quantitative research may discern the directional relationship between the main factor categories in the Awareness-Motivation-Capability framework. It may be the case that awareness factors, such as *access to environmental and social networks*, *regulatory pressures*, and *external push*, influence the motivational factors of companies to engage in sustainable partnerships. Alternatively, awareness factors could be influenced by motivational factors, when access to sustainable networks is sought out deliberately due to heightened organizational motivation levels.

In addition, it should be investigated in future research if capability factors, namely *resource capacity* and *partnership experience*, influence companies' motivation to engage in partnerships for sustainability or whether this relationship functions in the other direction. It should be tested if organizational capabilities are expanded due to business motivations to participate in sustainable partnerships. Given our qualitative research and without a targeted quantitative study, we can only speculate about the directions of effects. We see potential in further investigating the bidirectionality of the "resource capability" factor. Future research could investigate in depth the circumstances under which the assumptions of the resource-based view hold true and companies engage in partnerships to make up for a lack of resources and under which circumstances the lack of resources may be a hindrance to engaging in partnerships.

Concerning the motivation factors suggested in the findings section, we found that company engagement in business partnerships may arise from different combinations of underlying motivation elements. Quantitative research may help identify statistically significant configurations of motivational factors as well as the necessary awareness and capability factors.

Additionally, we suggest two external contextual factors, namely *temporal* and *geographical context*, as well as *business culture* as an internal contextual factor, all of which potentially influence the different levels of partnership engagement. Thereby, the observed contextual elements may help explain divergent organizational behavior and may lay the basis for further investigation.

Even though the heterogeneity in our sample allowed us to gain holistic insights into the rich and diverse nature of organizational antecedents to participate in social and environmental partnerships, we were not able to discern differences between various business types or industries. Future studies could build on this research to further explore possible differences between distinct company types, e.g., SMEs, which have largely remained unregulated in terms of their sustainability measures. Additionally, the psychological microfoundations of company engagement in partnerships for sustainability should be explored in more detail through further research. While our article provides salient insights into the importance of individuals, many personal characteristics and processes at the micro level underlying company engagement in partnerships for sustainability are yet to be investigated.

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**TABLES**

Table 3: List of interviewees

<b>No.</b>	<b>Company size (no. of employees)</b>	<b>Founding year</b>	<b>Interviewee role</b>
01	10-49	since 2010	Senior Project Manager
02	<10	since 2010	Head of Center
03	10-49	1945-2010	Managing Director
04	50-249	1945-2010	Product Development
05	50-249	1945-2010	Commercial Manager
06	>2000	1945-2010	Head of Global Trust and Safety
07	>2000	1945-2010	Sustainability Manager
08	>2000	before 1945	Sustainability Officer
09	>2000	1945-2010	Head of Sustainability
10	50-249	before 1945	Executive Partner
11	500-2000	before 1945	Head of Laboratory and Chemical Warehouse
12	<10	since 2010	Founder, CEO
13	>2000	since 2010	Sustainability Expert
14	>2000	before 1945	Corporate Officer Sustainability & Climate Protection
15	500-2000	before 1945	Product Manager Climate Protection and Energy Management
16	500-2000	before 1945	Member of the Executive Board
17	10-49	1945-2010	Managing Director
18	50-249	1945-2010	CEO, Executive Partner
19	10-49	since 2010	Business Development
20	<10	since 2010	Founder, CEO

*Appendix 2: Antecedents of company engagement in partnerships for sustainability*

*Table 4: Antecedents of company engagement in partnerships for sustainability. Highlighted factors are extensions / adaptations of the original framework.*

<i><b>Awareness</b></i>	<b>Access to Environmental/Social Networks</b>	Access to and awareness of Environmental/social Networks
		Personal Connections
	<b>Regulatory Pressure</b>	Established/Implemented Regulatory Pressure
		Regulatory Gap
	<b>External Pressure/Push</b>	Public Pressure
		Anticipated Public Pressure
Motivation/Push from External Supporter		
<i><b>Motivation</b></i>	<b>Industry Concentration</b>	Competitive Environment - Differentiation
		Reputation/Instrumental Communication
		Competitor/Supplier Participation
	<b>Industry Collaboration</b>	Common Goals/Problems
		Support/Knowledge Sharing
		Create Political Pressure
<b>Business-related Motivation</b>	Motivation from Employee/ Management	
	Motivation from Top Management/CEO	
	Social Impact/Common Good	
	Increasing Reach	
<i><b>Capability</b></i>	<b>Resource Capacity</b>	Financial Capacity
		Accessing/Sharing Financial Means
		Knowledge Capacity
	<b>(Cross-Sector) Experience</b>	Business History in Partnerships
		Personal Experience
<i><b>Context</b></i>	<b>External</b>	Temporal Context
		Regional Context
	<b>Internal</b>	Business Culture

**5.3 Appendix 3: Public health and political corporate social responsibility: Pharmaceutical company engagement in COVAX**

Authors: Markus Scholz, N. Craig Smith, Maria Riegler, Anna Burton

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**Abstract:** Pharmaceutical companies developed Covid-19 vaccines in record time. However, it soon became apparent that global access to the vaccines was inequitable. Through a media analysis and interviews as the pandemic unfolded (up to mid-2021), we provide an in-depth analysis of why companies engaged with the Covid-19 Vaccines Global Access Facility (COVAX). We discuss our empirical findings relative to the literature on Political Corporate Social Responsibility (PCSR). We provide an answer to the question of whether pharmaceutical companies have lived up to their responsibilities as corporate citizens and political actors and fulfilled the implied responsibility of fighting inequitable vaccine distribution. While all producers of WHO-approved vaccines engaged with COVAX, our analysis highlights the differential levels of COVAX engagement and identifies explanatory factors. We also explore the implications of our research for practice, in relation to the challenges of global access to Covid-19 vaccines and for access to medicines more generally.

**Keywords:** political corporate social responsibility, access to medicine, multi-stakeholder partnerships, Covid-19, COVAX

*Appendix 3: Public health and political corporate social responsibility: Pharmaceutical company engagement in COVAX*

Covid-19 triggered the biggest global health crisis since the Second World War. There were 5.7 million official Covid-19 deaths reported worldwide as of January 2022 (Johns Hopkins University, 2022), though excess deaths attributable to Covid-19 were estimated to be over 20 million (The Economist, 2022). Healthcare systems around the world had been overwhelmed, unable to meet the demand for care of many Covid-19 and other patients (Parkin, Kazmin, & Dempsey, 2021). The indirect effects of the pandemic on global health were also immense, ranging from its consequences for mental health through to social deprivation stemming from economic hardships that look set to continue for years to come (WHO, 2020).

The pharmaceutical industry had a potentially vital role in mitigating the effects of this disastrous scenario. Vaccines capable of protecting people from the virus, reducing its transmission, and ultimately creating herd immunity offered the best hope to soften the impacts of the pandemic, if not to end it altogether (Srivastava, 2021). Here the interplay of business and society becomes visible in extraordinary clarity. Could business respond effectively to a pressing social need? Would it do so in ways that served humanity as a whole as it faced the onslaught of a deadly pandemic?

From a standing start, pharmaceutical companies succeeded in developing effective vaccines in under a year—a process that typically takes five-to-fifteen years (Johns Hopkins University, 2021). In December 2020, following emergency approval by health authorities, vaccinations began in the UK and the US with the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine. More vaccines emerged soon after, with 16 vaccines in use by mid-2021, including the AstraZeneca/Oxford University vaccine in 166 countries and the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine in 102 countries (Holder, 2021). Long-standing doubts about pharmaceutical companies notwithstanding (Scholz & Smith, 2020), this was a huge success for the research-based pharmaceutical sector—and for society at large.

Nonetheless, despite the unprecedented speed of vaccine development and approval, huge challenges remained in securing equitable *access* to these vaccines for many of the world's

population. First, there was a massive shortage of vaccines due to global production capacity limitations as well as the immense logistical challenges of delivering vaccines to billions of people (The Economist, 2021b). Second, high-income countries were acquiring enormous quantities of vaccines—over one billion doses more than they needed (The Economist, 2021a). As of January 2022, 4.82 billion people worldwide had received a dose of a Covid-19 vaccine, equal to about 63 percent of the world population. However, while 78 percent of the population had received at least one dose in high- and upper-middle-income countries, only 11 percent of the population had received at least one dose of a vaccine in low-income countries (Holder, 2022).

The Covid-19 Vaccines Global Access Facility (COVAX), a multi-stakeholder partnership, had been created in April 2020 to provide equitable access to Covid-19 vaccines, not least given experiences of the HIV epidemic when lifesaving antiretrovirals took more than ten years to reach sub-Saharan Africa. As of mid-2021, COVAX could claim only limited success. The Director General of the WHO, explaining that COVAX was hampered in its efforts to reach its goals, called on countries *and* companies to do more (Tedros, 2021).<sup>5</sup> Many claimed that inequitable access to Covid-19 vaccines constituted a major ethical problem of human rights (e.g., Bachelet, 2021). This situation and the role of companies in it especially, raises questions of business and society that are of considerable theoretical significance as well as huge practical importance.

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<sup>5</sup> It is worth noting that Tedros was writing in April 2021 at a time when LMICs were predicted to follow a similar trajectory (in terms of Covid-19 infections, hospitalisations and deaths) to that of the more developed countries whose populations had, by and large, been exposed earlier to the pandemic. In fact, many (e.g., Africa) did not suffer to the same extent. We know now that there was subsequently a markedly uneven distribution of COVID-19 cases globally, with the severity of the pandemic not following the expected trajectory. Nonetheless, this does not undermine the case, certainly as of then, for equitable global distribution of vaccines.

*Appendix 3: Public health and political corporate social responsibility: Pharmaceutical company engagement in COVAX*

In this paper, we explore the *political corporate social responsibility* of pharmaceutical companies to collaborate with COVAX, as the primary means by which they could contribute to providing equitable access to Covid-19 vaccines. Political Corporate Social Responsibility (PCSR), in the dominant form as popularized by Andreas Scherer and Guido Palazzo (Scherer & Palazzo, 2007; 2011, cf. Scherer, Palazzo, & Baumann, 2006), can be seen to offer a normative justification for why vaccine producers would have a responsibility to engage with COVAX and thereby help mitigate inequitable access to vaccines.

In brief, PCSR “suggests an extended model of governance with business firms contributing to global regulation and providing public goods” (Scherer & Palazzo, 2011, p. 901). The concept is defined against the backdrop of the shortcomings of a neo-liberalist conception of democracy. From a neo-liberal perspective, pharmaceutical companies can be viewed as economic actors with no political responsibility to address the problem of global non-equitable access to vaccines. Their responsibilities would be limited to complying with hard laws and contractual obligations. Companies should only engage with social problems (e.g., non-equitable access to vaccines) if this engagement would be beneficial not only for society, but would also increase their profits (Friedman, 1962, 1970). This instrumental conception of corporate social responsibility is challenged by PCSR scholars (among many others) who argue that the “clear-cut division of labour” paradigm as dominant in the neo-liberalist conception of democracy is insufficient when it comes to tackling grand challenges like migration issues, climate change or, as most relevant for this paper, a global health crisis (Scherer & Palazzo, 2011, p. 922).

PCSR scholars advance a different concept of governance and democracy; specifically, deliberative democracy as pioneered by Jürgen Habermas (2001). Against the backdrop of globalization and the waning influence of governments to regulate in ways that adequately constrain corporate behaviour and combined with the decreasing capacity of traditional state actors to address grand challenges sufficiently, PCSR proponents argue that companies should



engage in public deliberation and contribute to self-regulation. Furthermore multinational enterprises should (and do already) engage in public goods provision such as public health, education, social security, and protection of human rights to fill the gaps left by governments unwilling or unable to act (Scherer & Palazzo, 2007, 2011; Scherer, Palazzo, & Seidl, 2013; Scherer, Rasche, Palazzo, & Spicer, 2016). From the perspective of a deliberative version of democracy, corporations are part of the governance mix and consistent with this perspective it seems reasonable to claim that vaccine-producing companies should have lived up to their political corporate responsibilities by engaging to a significant extent with COVAX and fostering equitable access to Covid-19 vaccines.<sup>6</sup>

We contend that the actual behaviour of vaccine-producing pharmaceutical companies in their engagement with COVAX (during our investigation period) provides a critical test case for PCSR. While PCSR is generally acknowledged as one of the dominant streams in business ethics (Scholz, de los Reyes, & Smith, 2019), it has also met heavy criticism. Whelan (2012, p. 717), citing Scherer and Palazzo (2007), claims that the “‘Political’ CSR writings appear[ing] to contradict the social sciences more generally: which presume that (Western) MNCs are predominantly motivated to generate considerable (if not outright maximal) returns for shareholders.” In reference to Stout (2012, p. 3), he goes on to criticize the “‘Political’ CSR literature [for] appearing to overlook the manner in which ‘shareholder value thinking’, and/or the ‘concern to maximize (...) shareholder wealth’, is ‘endemic in the business world today’.” More recently, Rhodes and Fleming (2020) have even argued that we should forget the idea of PCSR altogether, because it misconstrues the motivations of capitalist firms as being non-exclusively instrumental.

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<sup>6</sup> PCSR is not an undisputed concept. See the review by Frynas and Stephens (2015) and the critical response to this review by Scherer (2018). In this paper, we follow the definition given by Scherer and Palazzo in their path-breaking 2011 paper: “In a nutshell, political CSR suggests an extended model of governance with business firms contributing to global regulation and providing public goods” (Scherer & Palazzo, 2011, p. 901). See further descriptions in this paragraph.

*Appendix 3: Public health and political corporate social responsibility: Pharmaceutical company engagement in COVAX*

We concur with the general normative perspective of PCSR (Scherer et al., 2006; Scherer & Palazzo, 2007, 2011), i.e., that companies—especially those in the pharmaceutical industry—have extended responsibilities towards society and should engage in the provision of public goods, i.e., in public health and the protection of human rights.<sup>7</sup>

In this paper, we aim to contribute to the debate on PCSR and to the broader business-and-society questions of the role of pharmaceutical companies in providing access to Covid-19 vaccines, by examining the motivations of these companies in potentially stepping up to address the ‘grand challenge’ of equitable access to vaccines during a pandemic. To do so in this phenomenon-driven study (see e.g. Judge, McNatt, & Xu, 2011; Muller & Kräussl, 2011 as examples for phenomenon-driven studies), we explore the engagement of the Covid-19 vaccine-producing companies with COVAX between the start of the pandemic and mid-May 2021.<sup>8</sup> To the best of our knowledge, this historical snapshot’ is the first in-depth empirical analysis of company engagement with COVAX, a critical global health institution. The research questions we aim to answer are:

1. Why do pharmaceutical companies engage with COVAX?
2. What factors motivate, facilitate and hinder company engagement with COVAX?

As we elaborate in the next section, we see the Covid-19 pandemic as a unique and complex issue, distinguished by a high level of urgency, uncertainty, and risk (see also Sung et al., 2021). COVAX, as the initiative created in response to the pandemic, is in many respects an “extreme case” and its analysis can therefore provide a valuable contribution to understanding the circumstances under which companies act politically in the sense of engaging with multi-sector initiatives (Seawright, 2016). On the other hand, similarities with historical

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<sup>7</sup> For a toolbox to analyze the differential responsibilities of companies to engage with human rights issues see Scholz, Smith, and Williams (2021).

<sup>8</sup> Doh (2015) makes a strong case for the importance of phenomenon-based research in the international business and business-and-society fields. Similarly, Ployhart and Bartunek (2019) call for researchers to embrace contemporary phenomena.

cases can be found. We thus build upon existing scholarly knowledge on company engagement with multi-stakeholder partnerships, especially partnerships in the pharmaceutical industry such as the Global Antibiotic Research & Development Partnership (GADRP, see e.g., Ciabuschi, Baraldi, & Lindahl, 2020), as well as contribute to the broader literature on access to essential medicines (e.g., Vachani & Smith, 2004).

We proceed as follows. Section 1 describes the research context, with an overview of COVAX and pharmaceutical company engagement. The section further elaborates on normative PCSR theory and thus the political social responsibility of pharmaceutical companies to engage with global health issues and COVAX more specifically. Section 2 describes our research methodology based on an analysis of media reports, archival documents, and 21 semi-structured interviews with leading representatives of the pharmaceutical industry, civil society, funding members, and relevant institutional stakeholders of COVAX (see Table 7). Section 3 reports the results of our empirical study, structured by the factors that help explain company engagement with COVAX. In section 4, we discuss the reasons for the differential engagement of vaccine producers with COVAX. Finally, in section 5, we discuss our findings relative to the extant literature on PCSR, suggesting how they both support and extend existing theory, and explore what is needed to further build theory. We provide an answer to the question of whether pharmaceutical companies have lived up to their responsibilities as corporate citizens and political actors and fulfilled the implied responsibility of fighting inequitable vaccine distribution. We also explore the policymaker, civil society, and managerial implications of our research, in relation to the immense challenges of global access to Covid-19 vaccines and for access to medicines more generally, as well as for multi-stakeholder partnerships. We conclude by noting the limitations of our research and by proposing directions for further research.

## **RESEARCH CONTEXT**

### **A Brief Overview of COVAX**

*Appendix 3: Public health and political corporate social responsibility: Pharmaceutical company engagement in COVAX*

On 11<sup>th</sup> March 2020, the WHO declared Covid-19 a pandemic. Given the scale of the public health problem and the severe social and economic disruptions caused by Covid-19, substantial funding and efforts were expended into rapidly developing vaccine candidates.

The first vaccine candidates entered trials on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2020 (Thanh Le et al., 2020). Within a month, 115 vaccine candidates were in development and five of them had already moved to the clinical phase (though only one, from Moderna, would obtain promising phase III clinical trial data within the same year). CEPI, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (a global partnership launched in 2017 to develop vaccines to stop future epidemics), moved rapidly as well. By 19<sup>th</sup> March 2020, it had established R&D funding agreements with developers of eight promising vaccine candidates (including Oxford University, Moderna, and Novavax).

As of mid-2021, pharma had met the initial challenge. In record-breaking time, multiple pharmaceutical companies had developed vaccines and obtained emergency approval from the WHO, as well as other major health authorities, resulting in over one billion citizens around the world receiving vaccinations (Holder, 2021). While the rapid development of vaccines was certainly a success story, access to them soon became the overriding concern.

Inequitable access was foreseeable given historical precedent. Many middle- and low-income countries have long had far less access to life-saving medicines than high-income countries (Leisinger, 2009; Vachani & Smith, 2004). The H1N1 pandemic in 2009 had shown that rich countries were quick to monopolize access to potential vaccine candidates (Economist, 2021c; Fidler, 2010). Experts warned that there would be supply shortages once Covid-19 vaccines were developed, likely resulting in a situation of markedly unfair access (Scholz & Smith, 2020; Yamey et al., 2020).

Anticipating inequitable access, leaders called for a global solution (Gavi, 2021). With the pandemic growing rapidly, the Access to Covid-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator was launched on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2020 by the WHO, the presidents of France and the European Commission, and

the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. This platform was intended to bring together national governments, industry, civil society, and global health organizations<sup>9</sup> to accelerate the development, production, and equitable access to Covid-19 diagnostics, treatments, and vaccines (Gavi, 2021).

COVAX was the vaccine pillar of the ACT Accelerator. It was co-led by CEPI; Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance<sup>10</sup>; and the WHO. COVAX was created to address the issue of global equitable access to Covid-19 vaccines: “through portfolio diversification, pooling of financial and scientific resources, and economies of scale, participating governments and regional blocs can hedge the risk of backing unsuccessful candidates, just as governments with limited or no ability to finance their own bilateral procurement can be assured access to life-saving vaccines that would otherwise have been beyond their reach” (Gavi, 2021, p. 5).

Countries signed up to COVAX to provide financing (supplemented by contributions from other parties) and obtain supply of vaccines, with fully self-financing (richer) countries primarily funding the facility and either paying for both their own supply and that of poorer countries or, if they had secured sufficient supply via bilateral deals, only financing the supply to the funded (poorer) countries; of the 190 countries that signed up, 92 were low- and middle-income countries (The Economist, 2021b). COVAX established Advance Market Commitments (AMC) from manufacturers to procure the vaccines, with UNICEF handling the vaccine logistics. WHO allocation principles provided for WHO-approved vaccines to be distributed initially to all countries in proportion to their population size, enabling every country to start by immunizing the highest priority populations (WHO, 2021c). COVAX had defined three priority stages: in the first stage, all critical health and social care workers globally would

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<sup>9</sup> The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, CEPI, FIND, Gavi, The Global Fund, Unitaaid, Wellcome, the WHO, and the World Bank

<sup>10</sup> Gavi was formerly called the “Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization”. Its abbreviation has subsequently become a standalone name.

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be vaccinated (roughly 3% of the global population); followed by high-risk and older aged groups in stage two (circa 20%); and further priority groups in stage three.

As of May 2021, \$14.6 billion had been pledged to the ACT Accelerator (WHO, 2021a) and 72 million vaccines had been shipped to 126 participants (Gavi, 2021). Figure 1 illustrates the COVAX Facility set-up (see Gavi, 2021 for more detail).

*--- Figure 1 about here ---*

The stated goal of COVAX was “to help end the acute phase of the global pandemic by the end of 2021 by providing access to at least 2 billion doses of safe and effective Covid-19 vaccines to the most vulnerable in all participating economies” (Gavi, 2021). Until September 2020, re-purposed Gavi AMC funds amounting to \$500 million were the only financial means available to the COVAX Facility. The funds subsequently raised for COVAX were likely to be sufficient to finance procurement of the target number of vaccine doses, but when would they become available?

By mid-May 2021, 14 companies had successfully developed vaccines and applied for Emergency Use Listing (EUL) at the WHO (WHO, 2021b). Table 5 lists the major producers of vaccines that had received WHO approval as of mid-May 2021, funding information, their approval status by other health authorities, as well as the total number of administered vaccine doses and the companies’ published commitment of vaccine doses to COVAX. Given that COVAX could only buy and distribute WHO-approved vaccines, our analysis focuses on these companies. The final column reports company performance in the Access to Medicine Index, which identifies “best practice, tracks progress and shows where critical action is needed to improve access to medicine for the poor” (Access to Medicine Foundation, 2021).

*--- Table 5 about here ---*

We now provide a timeline of key events in company engagement with COVAX, focused on the engagement of companies with vaccines that had WHO EUL approval at the time of data collection.

## **The Development of Company Engagement with COVAX**

With vaccine candidates under development, national governments initiated conversations with companies as early as May 2020 to secure doses for their own populations through advance purchase agreements. COVAX also engaged in conversations with vaccine producers starting in May, though it would not have the necessary donor funding in place until September 2020. After signing a manufacturing agreement with Oxford University late April 2020, AstraZeneca was the first pharmaceutical company to sign a COVAX deal with CEPI and Gavi on June 4<sup>th</sup>, valued at \$750 million and supporting the manufacturing, procurement, and distribution of 300 million doses of the vaccine. The same day, AstraZeneca also completed a licensing agreement with the Serum Institute of India (SII), the world's largest vaccine manufacturer, to create access for low and lower-middle income countries.

After these announcements, COVAX concentrated mainly on securing funding over the summer months. Meanwhile, governments were making bilateral deals with vaccine manufacturers, albeit for unproven vaccines. In September, after almost three months without news of any supply commitment from pharma, SII became the second manufacturer to commit to COVAX. The Sanofi-GlaxoSmithKline collaboration followed in October.

In November 2020, positive interim data from phase III clinical trials of the Pfizer/BioNTech, Moderna and AstraZeneca/Oxford vaccines provided promising indications of their efficacy against Covid-19. AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson significantly increased their commitments to COVAX in mid-December, which provided COVAX with commitments for nearly two billion vaccine doses at the end of 2020—though no vaccines had yet completed clinical trials or been approved for use by regulatory authorities.

An export ban issued by India in early January 2021, against SII's AstraZeneca shots, severely impacted the COVAX forecast of vaccine supplies. COVAX finally came to terms in late January on an advance purchase agreement with Pfizer/BioNTech—though this was for up

to 40 million doses only and was over one month after the WHO had released details of talks with Pfizer on vaccine allocation. Shortly after, SII agreed to COVAX options on an additional massive amount of 1.1 billion doses of AstraZeneca and Novavax vaccines. In addition, three Chinese vaccine-producing companies (Sinovac, Sinopharm, and CanSinoBio) applied to join the initiative in late January 2021. (In July, the three Chinese manufacturers committed to providing 10 million doses of Covid-19 vaccines to COVAX.) The Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) applied in March 2021 to participate in COVAX, offering the Sputnik V vaccine.

Finally, in early May, advance purchase agreements with COVAX were signed with Moderna to secure up to 500 million vaccine doses—though statements on discussions had been announced back in October 2020. Novavax also pledged to provide 350 million doses in addition to the 1.1 billion it had pledged in February of its yet-to-be-approved vaccine. The vaccine developed by the Chinese manufacturer Sinopharm received WHO emergency authorization in the same month (though COVAX commitment negotiations were not finalized until July). Table 6 summarises the timeline of company engagement with COVAX.

A major milestone was reached on 23rd February 2021—months after the first vaccines had been administered to patients in countries that had struck bilateral deals—when COVAX kicked off its global rollout with the first vaccines shipped to Ghana.

*--- Table 6 about here ---*

### **Motivations for Company Engagement with COVAX**

Our focus in this paper is on the motivations for company engagement with COVAX against the backdrop of normative PCSR theory. In our understanding, from a normative PCSR perspective, businesses should be seen as “citoyens” (Scherer et al., 2006), i.e., corporate citizens with rights (e.g., intellectual properties) *and* responsibilities. These citoyens operate in a “post-Westphalian” (Falk, 2002; Kobrin, 2001; Santoro, 2010) or “post-national” constellation (Habermas, 2001, 2002; Scherer et al., 2006; Scherer & Palazzo, 2007, 2011). These constellations are defined by increasing levels of globalization with national



governments constantly losing power (e.g., to regulate equitable access to vaccines outside of their national borders) as well as by the rise in power of transnational corporations (e.g., vaccine-producing pharmaceutical companies) and other organizations in civil society (e.g., NGOs). In this context, the Friedman (1962, 1970) division-of-labour argument loses validity (i.e., the argument that governmental actors set the rules of the game and companies' only moral responsibility is to comply with hard laws while otherwise striving for profits).

Some CSR and many management scholars argue that companies should engage in win-win strategies—i.e., projects that tackle a societal problem and simultaneously increase the firm's financial bottom line (Porter & Kramer, 2011)—so as to maintain and bolster their legitimacy and therefore their social license to operate. PCSR proponents, by contrast, have higher expectations of companies. They even go beyond a contractualist approach towards business ethics that would demand companies comply with so-called hypernorms; i.e., certain meta-principles so fundamental that they constitute norms by which all others norms are to be judged (Donaldson & Dunfee, 1994; Donaldson & Dunfee, 1999; Donaldson & Dunfee, 2002). PCSR proponents normatively assign political responsibilities to transnational corporations. They build on a notion of politics that emphasizes deliberation, collective decisions, and a concern for (global) public goods (Scherer, Palazzo, & Matten, 2014; Young, 2010). PCSR proponents argue that to be considered responsible, corporations should engage in public deliberation, collective decisions, and provide public goods where public institutions fail to do so (Scherer & Palazzo, 2007, 2011; cf. de los Reyes, Scholz, & Smith, 2017; Scholz et al. 2020).

This point about a failure of public institutions is especially relevant to the question of fair access to Covid-19 vaccines. As of mid-2021, at least, it would seem reasonable to observe that global governance institutions failed to adequately anticipate, prevent, or to redress inequitable access to vaccines, notwithstanding the efforts described in our timeline in the previous section. Characterising the access problem as an issue of human rights, the International AIDS Society–Lancet Commission on Health and Human Rights observes:

“Unlike research efforts to develop Covid-19 vaccines, plans for distributing vaccines in low-income and middle-income countries (LMICs) have been underwhelming.” (Beyrer et al., 2021, p. 1525).

In addition, moral arguments for access to medicines generally and Covid-19 vaccines more specifically can certainly be grounded in human rights. First, because of the fundamental human right to health.<sup>11</sup> Second, because of the restrictions on human rights that stem *directly* from government responses to the pandemic, such as constraints on freedom of assembly and access to education (Santoro & Shanklin, 2020), but also *indirectly* from the economic consequences of the pandemic. As Bill and Melinda Gates (2020) observed, “Covid-19 affects every aspect of society” and, on multiple indicators of human welfare, “we’ve been set back about 25 years in 25 weeks.” While Michelle Bachelet (2021), the acting UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, stated: “the human rights impact of our global failure to vaccinate widely enough is profound. It is driving sharply divergent economic recoveries from the first waves of the pandemic.”

Nonetheless, while inequitable access to vaccines has severe medical and social consequences for LMIC populations, it may affect high-income countries negatively as well. Like any virus, the SARS-CoV-2, mutates. “Incomplete vaccine coverage, alongside ongoing community transmission, facilitates emergence of SARS-CoV-2 variants, which may lower vaccine efficacy.” (Beyrer et al., 2021, p. 1525). As of mid-2021, multiple mutations had been observed, some of which had proven particularly concerning (Pilling, Findlay, & Harris, 2021).

Thus, from a normative PCSR perspective, it can be argued that when states and global governance institutions fail to provide fair access to life saving vaccines, companies need to step up and help close this gap. From an access to medicine perspective, Leisinger (2009), former chair of the Novartis Foundation for Sustainable Development, strongly suggests that

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<sup>11</sup> See the UN Declaration of Human Rights, article 25 (1948); World Health Organization Constitution, preamble (1946); International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), article 12 (1966).

pharmaceutical companies in collaboration with the international community should ensure access to affordable, essential drugs in developing countries, offering recommendations also supported by the International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association (IFPMA).

While we argue that the normative foundations for why vaccine producing companies *should* engage with COVAX seem sound (from a PCSR perspective), empirical knowledge of what companies actually do in such situations is limited, as is understanding of their reasons for acting if and where they do act. With our analysis, we aim to help close this research gap. We also contribute to knowledge on how the vaccine-producing companies actually behaved during the midst of a global pandemic, thus shedding light on the question of whether these companies—during a global health crisis—lived up to the political responsibility of helping to create equitable access to Covid-19 vaccines. Moreover, our investigation contributes to the more general debate on the motivations of companies acting politically (in the sense of normative PCSR) when confronted with a global crisis.

As we argued above, PCSR has been criticized for being “agnostic and/or uncertain” (Whelan, 2012, p. 716) or outright naïve and wrong (Rhodes & Fleming, 2020) in describing the motivation of multinational corporations (MNCs). In their extensive conceptualisation of Corporate Citizenship, Matten and Crane suggest that MNCs might take on political duties and responsibilities as a result of being influenced by motivations that extend from “altruism to enlightened self-interest . . . [to] plain self-interest.” (Matten & Crane, 2005, p. 173). Similarly, Scherer, Palazzo, and Matten (2009, p. 328) suggest that the various political activities and practices of MNCs might be informed and/or motivated by “rational profit seeking (...) altruism, pro-social behaviour, isomorphic adaptation (...), path-dependencies, or argumentative entrapment.” Critics, however, assert that describing the motivations of MNCs as anything but self-interested against a reality of “shareholder value thinking,” and/or the

“concern to maximize (...) shareholder wealth,” which is “endemic in the business world today” (Stout, 2012: 3) is outright wrong (Rhodes & Fleming, 2020; Whelan, 2012).

We argue that our investigation of pharma companies’ tendencies to engage with COVAX provides a good opportunity to contribute to the general debate on the motivations of companies to live up to their purported political responsibilities as advanced by PCSR scholars. Ultimately, the results of our investigation contribute to the debate by demonstrating that most (if not all) companies, even during a global crisis, will *not* act altruistically and, more specifically, will not live up to their political responsibilities in the ways envisaged by PCSR scholars. We show that the instrumental reasons found in market-based approaches—i.e., acting out of (enlightened) self-interest (de Bakker, Rasche, & Ponte, 2019)—still seem best-suited to explaining company engagement in multi-stakeholder partnerships like COVAX.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders were combined with archival data sources and a systematic analysis of media reports to provide a comprehensive investigation into the factors influencing pharmaceutical company engagement with COVAX. The data were collected between our ‘snapshot’ period of November 2020 and early May 2021, during the development of the pandemic and the evolving company responses.

We began with openly accessible documents (i.e., Gavi board meeting minutes, presentations, as well as organizational documents outlining practices and procedures) to gain a better understanding of temporal and inter-actor dynamics in relation to COVAX (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2020). These documents were used to build understanding of the functions of COVAX, the vaccine procurement process and allocation framework, as well as the timeline.

We then conducted semi-structured interviews online with representatives of COVAX stakeholders (including the Access to Medicine Foundation, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, CEPI, European Commission, GSK, IFPMA, Johnson & Johnson, Novartis,

People's Vaccine Alliance, Sanofi, Takeda, UNICEF, USAID, WHO and the World Bank). Informants were selected to mirror the diversity of COVAX stakeholder perspectives. Additionally, we interviewed two experts who had insight into COVAX through their advisory roles (i.e., as academic experts and consultants). For industry interviews, we targeted companies with vaccine candidates that had received WHO emergency approval prior to May 2021 (as noted, WHO approval was essential because only approved vaccines could be purchased and distributed through COVAX).<sup>12</sup> This was an exceptionally busy time for everybody associated with COVAX. Overall, we were fortunate (and grateful) to be able to obtain 21 interviews with participants representing the stakeholder categories shown in Table 7 (including four interviews with three vaccine-producing companies). To ensure anonymity, we assigned codes to interviewees based on their stakeholder group. The research team transcribed a total of 13 hours and 29 minutes of recorded material, resulting in 193 pages of single-spaced interview transcripts.

*--- Table 7 about here ---*

Following each interview, emerging themes were discussed and summarized by the research team. Thereafter, each interview was transcribed, and more formal coding procedures were employed (Miles et al., 2020). Interview transcripts were coded by two members of the team, following the Template Analysis approach (King, Brooks, & Tabari, 2018; Knights & Clarke, 2014). Preliminary coding was carried out for a subset consisting of ten interviews. The resulting codes were discussed among the two coding researchers to cluster them into overarching themes (King et al., 2018). These themes were derived from the clustered codes across the qualitative data set. (Themes are defined by King and Horrocks (2010, p. 150) as “recurrent and distinctive features of participants’ accounts, characterising particular perceptions and/or experience which the researcher sees as relevant to the research question.”)

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<sup>12</sup> The Sinopharm vaccine received WHO emergency approval on May 07, 2021.

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When disagreements on the clustering of codes arose, the researchers discussed the matter until agreement was reached and an initial template could be created. Subsequently, the remaining interviews were coded in an iterative process of moving between our themes and the data, expanding and amending themes and codes when necessary. Following the data collection stage, the final set of identified themes, as well as the relationships between them were discussed to ensure homogeneity of each category and a shared understanding between the researchers.

In parallel, we conducted an exploratory media analysis using the Factiva database to better understand the timing of company engagement with COVAX, and to compare our interview findings with media reports. The terms “ACT-A OR ACT-Accelerator OR CEPI OR COVAX OR Gavi” were used to systematically search for relevant news articles. Following approaches applied in the extant literature (e.g., Hoffman & Ocasio, 2001; Kulchina, 2014), the search was restricted to English-language articles published between 1<sup>st</sup> March 2020 and 1<sup>st</sup> March 2021 from four leading and high circulation English-speaking business outlets: *Financial Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Forbes Magazine* and *Economic Times of India*. High circulation business publications act as opinion leaders and thereby influence the media coverage of other outlets, providing a quasi-representative perspective on the wider press discourse (Bednar, 2012). In addition to our Factiva search, two prominent industry publications, *Fierce Pharma* and *Pharma Times*, were also included (using the same search criteria) to obtain more industry-specific data.

Overall, 1,523 articles were downloaded. After removal of duplicates and articles that did not meet our inclusion criteria, 114 articles remained. To be included, articles needed to discuss COVAX in detail, discuss COVAX in relation to pharmaceutical company engagement, or outline facilitating and/or hindering factors for company involvement with COVAX. The media articles were coded openly and summarized based on re-occurring topics. The most common categories were: vaccine nationalism (discussed in 48 articles); criticism of high- and

middle-income countries (30); geopolitical tensions due to Covid-19 (21); bilateral manufacturing collaboration within the pharmaceutical industry (16); insufficient funding and slow set-up of COVAX (15).

As a final step, we combined the identified themes from the interview data with our codes from the media analysis. This was done by clustering the codes from the media analysis and integrating those thematic clusters into our template.

### **A THEMATIC ACCOUNT OF COMPANY ENGAGEMENT WITH COVAX**

Our interviews and media analysis generated empirical findings on the factors motivating companies to engage with COVAX. We structure these findings according to whether they are rather *market-based* or *political-institutional* reasons. In doing so, we conceptualize market-based explanations and political-institutional explanations to be two ends of a spectrum along which the individual themes are situated; with some being clearly on one end, while other themes may be situated closer to the centre (see e.g., Bartley, 2007; de Bakker et al., 2019; Pacheco, York, Dean, & Sarasvathy, 2010). These factors may either facilitate or impede pharmaceutical company engagement with COVAX and are either internal to the company or external (see Figure 5). Our analysis also identifies *moral considerations* that may help explain the observed differences in degree of company engagement with COVAX. We discuss each in turn and include references in parentheses to the relevant interview and media sources (see Table 7 and Appendix).

#### **Market-Based Reasons**

Market-based explanations suggest that companies engage with a multi-stakeholder partnership (COVAX in this instance) out of enlightened self-interest. This would be to *seize business benefits* (e.g., strengthening their market position, increasing profits or improving their reputation; Ordonez-Ponce, Clarke, & Colbert, 2021; Tashman, Flankova, Van Essen, & Marano, 2021); *reduce risks* (e.g., reputational risks, market risks, or legal risks; de Bakker et al., 2019; Fransen & Burgoon, 2014); or, *respond to external stakeholder pressures* (e.g.

investor pressures, consumer demands; de Bakker et al., 2019; Vurro, Dacin, & Perrini, 2010).

Our investigation of company engagement with COVAX lends support to these established explanations, which we now develop and explain in more detail.

**External funding.** By participating in COVAX, vaccine-producing companies could seize financial benefits by gaining access to external R&D funding through CEPI [IN4], as well as “secured financing and streamlined procurement” processes:

“One of the roles of COVAX is to ensure country readiness to roll out the vaccine when it is available (...). There is the platform of procurement, (...) with the objective to raise global funds to be able to pay (...) [for] the vaccines on behalf of the 92 countries included in the Advance Market Commitments. So, all the procurement and financing [is ensured and] (...) UNICEF delivers the vaccines.” [BUS3].

Thus, the financial risks incurred in vaccine development and manufacturing-at-risk, prior to a vaccine’s approval by health authorities, could be lowered. As another interviewee confirmed: “having funds enables them to complete the work of actually bringing a product into existence through the regulatory approvals process. It’s pretty significant (...) for the smaller companies that don’t have the kind of capital that larger companies do and so that’s a good thing” [IN4]. Funding seemed to be especially important for companies struggling to develop an effective Covid-19 vaccine:

“If you look at (...) what’s happening in the vaccine market, it’s a land-grab by Pfizer (...) So, what is Pfizer’s incentive to help everyone else scale up their production? It’s very low, but if you’re one of the others that’s trying to get up and struggling a bit, then you have a much stronger incentive to collaborate” [E2].

This sentiment was supported by other interviewees as well: “the companies that were supported by CEPI, you know, get somebody to buy their product and get an early commitment to have somebody buy their product when they don’t know if it’s going to work. Yet, the companies that are more established, they figured it’s worth them taking the risk” [IN1]. With an increasing number of iterations and trial rounds, the costs mount and it becomes increasingly difficult for companies to extend R&D phases without external funding. In addition, as our



media analysis confirmed, “even profitable big pharma groups have shied away from investing in vaccines for outbreaks without public funding” [FT1].

**COVAX services.** In addition to funding, COVAX offered several services to participating companies, such as a *streamlined regulatory framework and processes* (which also tie-in to opportunity-related company drivers for engagement). This made it possible for companies to access global markets through a single channel, “rather than worrying about regulation in country X and Y and Z and the costs and problems of registration” [CSO2].

Once committed to COVAX, companies could also take advantage of the WHO-established *vaccine allocation scheme*, which meant that companies could delegate morally difficult decisions about who gets the vaccine to an external entity [BUS1, FM3]. As one of our company interviewees explained, “you don’t want to be as a company in the middle of deciding on allocation (...) we’re not well positioned to decide which volume should go where or which country needs it most and [COVAX] makes it easier for industry” [BUS1].

COVAX also provided the *logistics and distribution networks* to minimize company risk and optimize operational functionality. Working with UNICEF, through COVAX, companies were able to benefit from its extensive experience in vaccine distribution in developing countries: “the distribution of vaccines is challenging and COVAX has an infrastructure that exists” [FM3]. In relation to this, the media analysis and some interviewees [FM2, BUS1, IN2, FM3, BUS3] also emphasized the reduced risk associated with COVAX-managed logistics and supply chains. Companies could take advantage of established vaccine distribution platforms and rest assured that “it’s a machinery which works already. You know it has proven to work when it comes to vaccine distribution” [FM2].

In sum, COVAX provided *market access* [CSO1, FM2, BUS1, CSO2, IN1, IN2, IN3, IN4]. On the one hand, COVAX could “ensure that vaccines are accessible to these [low and lower-middle income] countries at affordable prices” [FM2] and companies could “make [their] vaccines available to end this pandemic (...) in the global market place” [IN1]. While especially

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relevant for companies with less vaccine experience, established manufacturers could also benefit from the “opportunity to have access, [the] right, to these markets that otherwise would be very difficult for them” [IN2], as we have explained.

**Reputational drivers.** Consistent with the literature on market-based approaches, our interviewees mentioned factors concerning company *reputation* as an essential decision factor. For one, companies strived to *protect their public image* as responsible companies. Although engagement with COVAX did not influence company ranking in the Access to Medicine Index (an independent ranking based on pharmaceutical company efforts to improve access to their medicines in poorer countries), interviewees reported a general industry awareness of the link between increasing access to medicines and company reputation [E1, CSO2, CSO2, IN3, E2].

Some companies also viewed engagement with COVAX as an *opportunity to strengthen reputation*. However, this opportunity was greater for lesser-known companies or companies not traditionally active in vaccines, while established vaccine-producing companies with sufficient financial means were more reluctant to engage since they “do not want strings attached” [IN1]. Some companies tried to leverage their COVAX engagement publicly to improve their reputation [CSO1, CSO2, IN1, BUS1, BUS2]. Johnson & Johnson and AstraZeneca strongly emphasized their commitments to COVAX in major communications relating to their vaccine candidates [E1, FM2]. While for “the lesser-known companies and candidates (...) it’s a way to sell vaccines and to make vaccines available to end this pandemic as well as to get a lot more brand recognition in the global marketplace” [IN1].

Obtaining access to global markets through a single channel (COVAX), new market entrants were able to capitalize on international demand for limited supplies, while also gaining reputational benefits from helping to provide vaccines equitably for low and lower-middle income countries during the crisis. One business interviewee spoke about how company action on access to medicines contributed significantly to a positive reputation with existing and future employees [BUS8]. Moreover, after most high-income countries had secured direct deals with

the initially successful vaccine producers (e.g., Pfizer), companies that missed out joined COVAX because “they go towards what’s left, but at the same time they go for what’s good for their reputation. And then they look like the good guy” [CSO1].

***Liability minimization.*** While business opportunities were important, our interviewees suggested that companies placed a greater premium on the opportunity to minimize *legal liabilities* [FM2, IN1, BUS2, IN3, IN4, FM3]. Several interview partners reported that companies may have engaged with COVAX to *minimize their liability* since COVAX offered both an established indemnification and liability mechanism [IN4] and a “no-fault compensation scheme” [IN3], which was especially relevant for distribution in countries potentially unable to meet the terms of the indemnification [FM2, IN1, BUS2, IN3, IN4, FM3]. As an institutional member explained, COVAX is “addressing industry’s concerns around liability through indemnification [agreements] and then also this compensation mechanism; [this] is something that is considered by industry to have been well done and effective and therefore a separate inducement for them to participate in supplying their products through COVAX because, you know, they have that degree of comfort in terms of the introduction of vaccines into markets, where there may indeed be adverse events arising” [IN4].

The no-fault compensation fund for the GAVI-92 countries (the 92 LMIC countries covered by the Advanced Market Commitment in COVAX) was created because some countries might not be able to live up to the terms of the indemnification: “It really sort of de-risks for industry, a lot of the legal liability, and obviously makes it much fairer to compensate people in these countries in the event of harm from the vaccine” [IN1]. COVAX also ensured that the no-fault compensation scheme was fully funded, providing financial security to LMICs potentially unable to pay out liability claims [BUS3]. In addition to our interviewees, the media analysis also suggested that liability issues were a major concern for companies, exacerbated by the fact that standard liability insurance was not available in the pandemic context.

**External stakeholder pressure.** When it comes to the “*stakeholder pressure*” factors identified in the literature as part of market-based reasons, multiple different mechanisms seem to be at play with COVAX. On the one hand, investors, the media, state actors, as well as civil society representatives and international organizations were exerting pressure on vaccine manufacturers. On the other hand, media reporting (and criticism) focused more strongly on the role and responsibility of high-income countries in striking bilateral deals with vaccine manufacturers and much less on their counterparts, the pharmaceutical companies.

Moreover, even though investors had increased their attention to the access-to-medicine issue recently [CSO1], this did not appear to directly inform company Covid-19 vaccine access strategies. Nonetheless, investors, civil society representatives, and the media certainly exhibited support for COVAX and exerted pressure on vaccine manufacturers to participate: “there was a hell of a lot of pressure from civil society, the public, the media” [CSO2]. Another interviewee commented that there was action “only really when we were really ratcheting up the pressure and basically saying, ‘we’re going to have to start saying something about why there’s no deal’” [IN2].

The stronger the external stakeholder pressure on companies, the more difficult it became for them not to participate in COVAX to avoid “negative press” [E2]. As one interviewee described it, “Pfizer committed 40 million to COVAX, so then again never too late (...) but then again, they already had their fair share of high-income countries and money there, right? (...) it’s all a strategy game for them, it’s how they can be seen in the eyes of the public, how they can be seen in the eyes of the governments, and how much money they can make” [CSO1]. Moreover, external pressure was not one-way: “those investors will want to see a return” [E2]. However, “Covid (...) put access to medicines (...) as a material issue for investors on the map” [CSO1].

Interviewees also reported that vaccine manufacturers were exposed to various *political pressures* [CSO2, IN2, IN5]. Some spoke of the perennial threat from intellectual property

waivers (Vachani & Smith, 2004), if companies did not engage with COVAX. Meanwhile, vaccine-producing countries such as India, Russia, and China (where governments were in control of national vaccine manufacturing), appeared to follow geopolitical motivations in their Covid-19 vaccine distribution strategies, engaging in a form of “vaccine diplomacy” [ET22]. These governments pressured manufacturers in their countries not to engage with COVAX, so that vaccine allocation could be used instrumentally to “bolster (...) international image by increasing support for global health initiatives” [FT17].

***Lack of previous experience with multilateral organisations.*** In addition to these market-based drivers, we found a range of market-based inhibitors to company engagement with COVAX. Even if companies showed strong interest in engaging with COVAX, some experienced difficulties due to their *lack of experience with multilateral organisations* in collaborating with global organisations such as Gavi and UNICEF [IN3]. As one interviewee explained:

“We started and then we just weren’t able to come to a final larger agreement and it wasn’t for lack of trying, and I don’t think it was for lack of any good faith on Moderna’s part (...) it was really early days. And um, quite frankly (...) we didn’t know what we were doing and they didn’t know what they were doing, and for them, it was confounded by the fact that they hadn’t ever had a product that came to market before (...) I know individual people in the company that had come from other companies that had engaged in this, but as a company collectively, they hadn’t pulled that kind of stuff together” [IN4].

Moreover, collective action is not common in pharma. As one interviewee put it, “sometimes they do collaborate on certain fronts. But most of the time I want to say this is not current (...) practice in the industry” [CSO1]. Companies generally engage in “bilateral manufacturing arrangements” [BUS4] and technology transfers [CSO1]. The media analysis also indicated that if pharmaceutical companies did collaborate, it most commonly took place bilaterally; for example, media articles elaborated extensively on the number of manufacturing agreements struck by AstraZeneca to increase global vaccine production capacity and supply.

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Lack of experience in vaccines also potentially led to an “underestimation of complexity” [BUS1], as well as an over-commitment by some pharmaceutical companies [E2]. It also created communication hiccups for some companies [BUS1, E2]. As one interviewee (from a different pharmaceutical company) put it (also see related media coverage [FP10]):

“If we look at AstraZeneca as an example, who is also not an experienced vaccine company, I think. They probably, well definitely, stepped into this with all the big, I would say, good goodwill. And then I think, because of lacking the experience, I think probably did not realize the difficulty in which it could end up in all of these supply discussions, because, of course, with experience, you know that you will have lots of manufacturing issues and that you know scaling up is a challenge and that you need to be careful on what you promise because difficulties will arise. So (...) with the experience (...) you’re a little bit more careful making bold statements or big commitments” [BUS1].

**Product fit.** Interviews and media analysis indicated some hesitation by COVAX towards certain vaccine candidates, reflecting a lack of product-market fit [E1, FM2, IN2, E2, BUS8]. Building on the general viability question of mRNA vaccines (as further discussed in the opportunities and company strategy section), experts were additionally sceptical towards the appropriateness of mRNA vaccines in developing countries. These concerns mainly stemmed from the *ultra-cold chain logistical set-up* and the increased supply chain difficulties: “So, this explains why (...) [Gavi] didn’t conclude deals for that huge number of doses, because of the ultra-cold chain requirements which are difficult to handle in some of the 92 countries (...) the infrastructure is not there” [FM2].

Higher-priced vaccines were also deemed less appropriate for low and lower-middle income countries [FM2, IN2, IN4, BUS8]. And while COVAX had created a no-fault compensation scheme (discussed earlier), some companies still had liability concerns and required additional indemnification and liability agreements as well as country-specific checks prior to delivery [FM1]. This was particularly a concern for those manufacturers with low product-market fit for their vaccines in developing countries. Media articles as well as interviewees elaborated on the heightened risk stemming from the distribution of vaccines

requiring ultra-cold chains [E1, FM2, IN2, E2], aside from the broader concerns of administering vaccines that only have emergency use authorization [IN5] and in a pandemic of unprecedented scale with many unknowns.

***Profit inclinations of companies.*** Ultimately, company engagement with COVAX was still inhibited by the common denominator of profit, the exigencies of a pandemic notwithstanding. Some vaccine-producing companies did not engage or engaged only to a modest degree because of their profit inclinations [CSO1, FM1, FM2, BUS1, CSO2, IN1, BUS2, IN2, IN3, IN4, E2, FM3, BUS8]. From an opportunity cost perspective, especially in the early phases of vaccine production and distribution when global supply of vaccines was limited, it was significantly more profitable for companies to cut direct deals with richer nation states or the EU than to engage with COVAX. Vaccine manufacturers were dealing with a trade-off between “commercial opportunity vs. contribution to public health” [BUS1]. It was acknowledged that companies took operational and financial risks when creating vaccines, but did that justify “pay[ing] most attention to the demands of those with [the] deepest purses? (...) Such realities cannot be ignored. But can they be transcended?” [FT51].

### **Political-Institutional Reasons**

While our results demonstrate the importance of market-based drivers and disincentives, they also indicate that company engagement with COVAX can be explained in part by reasons that are more *political-institutional*. While political-institutional approaches acknowledge that companies mostly seek to advance their self-interest, they also conceive of companies as embedded in their social and institutional context—including societal expectations of responsible business conduct—which influences their actions and to which they need to adapt to maintain legitimacy (Bartley, 2007; Dashwood, 2014; de Bakker et al., 2019; Reinecke & Ansari, 2016).

***Lack of trust towards pharma.*** While COVAX created incentives for vaccine manufacturers to join, pharma was still mistrusted within some COVAX member organisations

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and stakeholders. The industry had improved its image over the past decade (Edelman, 2020), but it started from a low base and doubts were expressed about the motives of pharmaceutical companies, leading to factors disincentivizing engagement with COVAX [FM1, BUS1, IN1, IN2, BUS4]. One company representative commented: “we are not really seen as a 100% trusted partner (...) there is always this (...) assumption that industry will go for profits before going for (...) the right solution or the best solution” [BUS1]. Some actors within COVAX were opposed to including industry representatives on committees, which made collaboration with the industry more difficult: “They didn’t want a current industry person and they didn’t want anybody representing one of the industry organizations and it was hard to settle on and identify a former industry person who could speak from the industry perspective (...) that’s clearly something that desperately needs to be fixed going forward” [IN1].

*Country influence.* The media analysis as well as our interviewees highlighted how governments impeded the initiative in multiple ways. They included insufficiently timely monetary commitments to COVAX from high-income countries and, critically, the countries’ bilateral, or in the case of the EU, supra-national deals with vaccine-producing companies as an alternative to using COVAX. This emerged as *the* major obstruction to company engagement with COVAX, identified by all interviewees as well as throughout the media. The bilateral national and EU-level deals led to a situation where vaccines were no longer available in sufficient quantities when COVAX was eventually operational, equipped with political legitimacy, and (at least) initial financial resources with which to buy vaccines. This problem was also referred to as “vaccine nationalism” [BUS3, IN3, IN4]. As one interviewee explained: “there are certain countries that are very, very, very advanced on their vaccination program. What happened was that they bought the vaccines in advance of everybody else (...) so they stockpiled, and they ensured that their markets were (...) not only fully served, but in certain cases, they secured vaccines to vaccinate their populations three times over” [IN2]. Vaccine nationalism was also by far the most identified theme in the media analysis; not only how it



created unnecessarily heightened levels of competition and supply shortages [e.g., FT6, FT57, F8], but also how it limited the ability to quickly scale the production of the best vaccine candidate [e.g., F7, WSJ11].

Vaccine nationalism was especially perilous for global health when countries imposed export bans on vaccines (and their ancillaries) so as to direct production to serve their domestic populations [FM1, IN3, E2, BUS3, CSO2, BUS2]:

“I mean AstraZeneca is by far the biggest supplier of COVAX. This is now why there is now a big problem because there’s supply shortages. And there will be delays in deliveries because India is now imposing the export restrictions. Basically, they are prioritizing domestic vaccination. They want to accelerate domestic vaccination ... so that’s now the big problem they [COVAX] face with AstraZeneca” [FM2].

Media articles drew parallels with government behaviours and business practices exhibited during the H1N1 outbreak in 2009 and urged that the “response to the pandemic does not have to copy the failures of swine flu” [FT11]. Similarly, interviewees emphasized that Covid-19 vaccination was a global issue and that “no one is safe until everyone is safe” [BUS2], a point also widely reflected in media articles: “Businesses and governments must understand that the future is not a zero-sum contest in which winners win only when someone else loses. It is a co-operative endeavour in which we all make progress together” [FT13]. Nonetheless, the “highest-bidding” [CSO1] industrialized countries that secured a quick supply of vaccine doses for their own populations did promise to donate excess doses to poorer countries, with excess supplies to be potentially traded on a COVAX exchange platform [FM3, IN2].

Also weakening COVAX was some countries not wanting the AstraZeneca vaccine because it was considered less effective against the Sars-Cov-2 variants dominant in their region [E2, WSJ10].<sup>13</sup> Some countries were hesitant about joining COVAX for geopolitical reasons

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<sup>13</sup> With Brexit as the backdrop, some European politicians also spoke out against the AstraZeneca vaccine, citing unfounded claims of diminished efficacy in some age groups, a move that curtailed demand for the vaccine and was later said to have contributed to hundreds of thousands of unnecessary deaths in unvaccinated populations (Walsh, 2022).

and preferred to purchase vaccines outside of COVAX [IN2]. Equally, some countries were sceptical of COVAX's effectiveness and sought alternative purchase-pooling arrangements, such as the African Union's vaccine pool [FM1, BUS2]. Accordingly, the media analysis highlighted articles that argued for procurement alternatives to COVAX, aiming to ensure vaccine supply in LMICs.

Regulatory threats (such as debates on IP waivers) seem to have played only a minor role in company engagement with COVAX as of mid-2021, perhaps because no concrete regulatory threats had become manifest during the first year of the pandemic. This issue became more prominent in the second half of 2021.

### **Moral Considerations**

Given that most of the market-based and political-institutional factors apply to all pharmaceutical companies to a certain extent, these factors cannot fully explain the differential engagement with COVAX. *Micro-level moral factors* on the executive and company level also appear to have played a role.

*Access strategy and the executive team.* We found that company engagement with COVAX was also driven by the inclinations of the executive team and the associated commitment to generating access in the corporate strategy. One interviewee described companies as "hav[ing] personalities" [IN3] reflected in corporate strategies and values, and multiple interviewees referred to corporate culture and strategy as a relevant factor in company decisions to engage with COVAX early on [BUS1, CSO1, E2, FM3]. Some companies had made increasing access to medicine an important part of their strategy in recent years [BUS1, BUS8] and one interviewee commented: "we see the pharmaceutical industry move in the right direction on access when there is a clear prioritization of the needs" [CSO1]. Nonetheless, performance in the Access to Medicine Index does not appear to predict company level of engagement with COVAX (see Table 1).

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Commitment to global equitable access to medicines and engagement in COVAX was reportedly facilitated by the inclinations of individual executive team members [E1, CSO1, IN1, IN2, IN3, E2]. “There are a bunch of candidates that were not supported by CEPI, where (...) the CEO feels strongly, a social and global obligation, like J&J” [IN1]. However, the strategy of some companies with regards to COVAX was said to be detrimental to some company decisions to engage with the initiative [E1, CSO1, IN1]. The difficulty in dealing with companies that were not really willing to substantially engage with COVAX is described in detail by one interviewee representing an institutional member. Noting that “there have definitely been manufacturers who are very clear from their corporate perspective that they are in this for an understanding of their contribution to ending a pandemic,” this person continued:

“There are other manufacturers who are very clear that they are in this from a business perspective, and so have been unwilling to actually have any serious conversation about tiered pricing (...) Companies who have (...) put one barrier after the next in front of actually deploying vaccines, you know, requiring countries to sign 40 pages of documents on agreements with the country if they’re going to use their vaccine, doing their own individual country-by-country due diligence on the likelihood of risk related to indemnification liability in the face of the COVAX facility, which has, you know, signed indemnification liability forms [that] are signed by every country, and there’s a no-fault compensation scheme. Like, there are definitely companies where nothing was good enough, and wanted to drill down on absolutely every single thing, while, simultaneously, there were companies that were like, ‘yeah, this is fine, let’s get going’ So, I think (...) some manufacturers (...) have been really, really hard to work with” [IN3].

While unwilling to state it directly, this interviewee essentially suggests that some companies hampered negotiations with COVAX to delay supplying vaccines that could be more profitably sold elsewhere (see section 4).

*Altruism.* Inclinations of the executive team seemed to be closely associated with the individual altruistic motives and internal moral drivers for COVAX engagement, as several interviewees reported. Underlying reasons to engage with COVAX were described by company representatives as well as external stakeholders as wanting to “do the right thing” [E2] and to

ensure a need-based allocation to “contribute to global good” [FM3]. It was also portrayed as being about having a corporate strategy that does not put profits first [CSO1, FM2, BUS1].

As one of the main roles of COVAX was to deal with allocation issues, lifting the burden from companies of making moral decisions on the prioritization of vaccine access was likely another reason behind company engagement. While still cutting deals with individual countries, “firms do not want or cannot decide on the global allocation processes” [BUS1]. Meanwhile, the WHO’s Dr Tedros charged that, “It’s not right that younger, healthier adults in rich countries are vaccinated before health workers and older people in poorer countries” and he called on pharmaceutical companies to actively participate in equitable global access [FT37].

### **Understanding the Differential Engagement of Companies with COVAX**

Companies differed markedly in their degree of engagement with COVAX (see Table 1). To understand why, we take three of the leading vaccine-producing companies as exemplary cases (AstraZeneca, Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna). While our research certainly indicates a role for *moral considerations*, companies primarily engaged with COVAX because of *market-based* and *political-institutional* factors. Applying our prior analysis, we argue that differential *contractual obligations*, *differential opportunities and company strategy*, and *differential reputational pressures* are the factors that best explain why these firms engaged with COVAX to a varying degree.

***Funding and contractual obligations.*** The individual engagement of vaccine producers cannot be sufficiently understood without considering their funding sources and contractual obligations. There were substantial differences in the extent to which the three companies accepted public funding for vaccine development. Contractual obligations tied to funding by nation states significantly influenced company vaccine access strategies and their willingness—and ability—to engage with COVAX.

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In creating the initial advance purchase agreements, Gavi primarily approached those vaccine producers with which it had prior relationships (though CEPI also provided funding for R&D conducted by lesser-known manufacturers and start-ups). Often this left more room for national governments to provide significant funding to other companies' Covid-19 vaccine R&D and manufacturing programs. While CEPI funded various vaccine candidates, including those of Oxford University and Moderna (CEPI, 2021), the UK government provided substantial funding for AstraZeneca (Safi, 2021) and the US government-funded Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA) also provided significant financial contributions to help fund the research of Moderna and AstraZeneca (BARDA, 2021). National financial contributions were commonly tied to first-access contractual clauses, limiting the scope for firms to engage with COVAX from the outset (for Moderna see Moderna, 2020; for AstraZeneca see Isaac & Deutsch, 2021).

Pfizer received public funding indirectly, since its partner BioNTech was heavily subsidized by the German government for many years prior to Covid-19 (Griffin & Armstrong, 2020). However, Pfizer rejected direct funding from BARDA. Thus, it was not bound by contractual obligations and was able to maintain full control of its vaccine distribution strategy, without a requirement to consider national priorities (Czachor, 2020).

By contrast, AstraZeneca faced the strongest pressure to engage with COVAX, due to both the funding it had received from CEPI, as well as the contractual commitment made to Oxford University to provide equitable global access. However, AstraZeneca also negotiated bilateral agreements, especially given that it had received significant funding from the UK. Therefore, AstraZeneca prioritized supplying the UK during the initial phases of vaccine distribution (Isaac & Deutsch, 2021).

While Moderna had received initial R&D funding through CEPI, generally requiring formal dose commitments to COVAX, the company did not commit to COVAX until five months after its initial FDA authorization. This was essentially due to the heavy funding

Moderna had also received from BARDA, putting it under pressure to serve the US market once its vaccine was authorized (Sagonowsky, 2020).

***Opportunities and company strategy.*** As our interviews and media analysis suggest, COVAX's institutional members, in line with the predictions made by global experts (see e.g. Hopkins, Eastwood, & Moriarty, 2021), severely underestimated the viability and/or scaling capacity of mRNA vaccine programmes (e.g., Curevac, Moderna, Pfizer/BioNTech). Against all expert predictions, mRNA-technology vaccines were not only authorized for the first time in history in 2020, but Pfizer's Covid-19 vaccine was also the first vaccine candidate to become available and authorized by national health agencies. The unanticipated quick development and the timing of authorizations by multiple national health authorities gave Pfizer (in cooperation with BioNTech) a significant competitive (first-mover) advantage in satisfying the immense global demand (Lieberman & Montgomery, 1988). We suggest that Pfizer's behaviour relative to COVAX can best be explained by a market-based rationale; i.e., its actions were principally motivated by instrumental reasons. Pfizer started supplying vaccines to the highest bidders through direct deals (UNICEF, 2021). Given its for-profit corporate strategy for Covid-19 vaccines (Robbins & Goodman, 2021), as well as the limited vaccine supply, Pfizer maximized its profits by engaging in direct deals with high-income countries.

Against this backdrop, AstraZeneca's approach to vaccine distribution must be understood quite differently, but still as at least partially instrumental. Given its pledge to a not-for-profit strategy, the company-initiated discussions with COVAX in mid-2020 and came to terms on dose commitments as early as June 2020. Considering that AstraZeneca's vaccine candidate was provided by Oxford University under a contractual commitment to non-profit pricing and global access, AstraZeneca was strongly incentivized to engage with COVAX. However, dealing with COVAX was also a volume-maximizing strategy for the company that secured substantial revenues and the prospect of future profits with the end of the pandemic (when it could drop the not-for-profit provision in many markets). This strategy is also evident

in the large number of bilateral manufacturing and technology transfer agreements that AstraZeneca struck globally to increase production capacity (Reuters, 2021).

By mid-2021, Covid-19 vaccine demand in high-income markets had largely been met through bilateral deals. This encouraged Moderna to consider alternative channels of distribution. According to some of our interviewees, this was a further explanation for why Moderna committed to COVAX relatively late—to gain access to global markets [E2]. Due to the company's limited experience in vaccines, Moderna could also realise significant benefits from COVAX services, as previously described.

Pfizer arguably had much less to gain from engaging with COVAX as an established player in the pharmaceutical industry with extensive expertise in vaccine manufacturing and global distribution. As a company known for having a highly risk-averse corporate strategy [IN3], Pfizer could better ensure vaccine quality (an especially relevant consideration for vaccines requiring cold-chain distribution) and limit the associated liability concerns by remaining in full control of vaccine distribution and forgoing (substantial) COVAX participation.

**Reputation.** The third key factor explaining differential company engagement with COVAX are reputational concerns. Our interviewees highlighted that the vaccine-producing companies were exposed to external reputational pressures from the media, governments, civil society, as well as industry representatives, which substantially influenced their Covid-19 pandemic response, as earlier described.

These reputational pressures can also help to explain Pfizer's engagement in COVAX. As we indicated above, Pfizer's behaviour relative to COVAX can best be explained by a market-based rationale. The company primarily aimed at supplying vaccines to the highest bidders through bilateral agreements (UNICEF, 2021). However, as an established player in the global vaccine business, which had publicly advocated for equitable global access and had been ranked highly in the Access to Medicines Index over the preceding five years (Access to

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Medicine Foundation, 2021), not engaging with COVAX could have been perceived as hypocritical. As one of our interviewees indicated, by committing a small number of vaccines to COVAX, Pfizer largely avoided negative press (as of mid-2021) [E2].

AstraZeneca turned its contractual obligations to Oxford University, as well as its difficulties in securing FDA approval and U.S. market entry, into an opportunity to reap reputational benefits from an access-focused vaccine distribution strategy. Its extraordinary commitment to global access received significant praise, with some going as far as proclaiming it was the “white knight” in vaccines [BUS7]. However, AstraZeneca also faced significant public relations challenges. It stumbled in its communications, facing criticism over R&D reporting of vaccine efficacy data, dose supply, and potential side effects—problems attributed to the company’s lack of experience in vaccines (Boseley, 2021). “AstraZeneca has never launched a vaccine at the global scale that it has, and it has stumbled many times now. They’ve had really big communication problems. They’ve really bungled. God bless them that they’re doing what they’re doing. They’ve clearly not been the experienced partner that we would have seen from [other pharmaceutical companies]” [IN3; also see FP10]. Delivery delays, difficulties in manufacturing to meet vaccine supply commitments, and the associated communication missteps, escalated into legal action being taken by the EU against the firm (Guarascio & Vagnoni, 2021).

Moderna is somewhat of an outlier in the pharmaceutical industry. It had not launched a commercial product before its success with the Covid-19 vaccine. It therefore did not have an established reputation in the industry. Interviewees suggested that it was exposed to higher levels of investor pressure to maximize revenue than its counterparts with successful vaccine programmes [E2, BUS8]. They believed that this had reduced the incentive for Moderna to engage with COVAX. However, after the demand in high-income markets had been saturated,



our interpretation is that the company could then approach the distribution of its vaccine more strategically, to build a positive brand image by supplying COVAX.<sup>14</sup>

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

Our investigation of corporate practices during a global health crisis explores a profoundly important business-and-society relationship. In the first (to our knowledge) empirical study of pharmaceutical companies and COVAX, we examine how these companies engaged with this vital global institution in the context of a pandemic. At a general level, our research contributes to a better understanding of the crisis responses of business within the broader societal context (see Bapuji et al., 2020), by identifying key internal and external hindering and facilitating factors for company engagement with COVAX (see Figure 5). More specifically, our investigation contributes to the somewhat heated debate on PCSR, adding some nuance to the question of whether MNCs would act actually live up to their responsibilities in the sense of providing help in addressing global issues that nation states seem unable to adequately address. In so doing, it also speaks to multi-stakeholder partnerships and the issue of access to medicines.

*--- Figure 2 about here ---*

### **Contributions to Theory**

As we report, companies are driven to engage with COVAX by various factors that can be aligned with current theory on why companies participate in multi-stakeholder partnerships. Given the unprecedented nature of the Covid-19 crisis, our study contributes to extant literature by testing and contextualizing if certain “theories and practices of business and society are robust to Covid-19” (Bapuji et al., 2020).

As we highlighted in section 1, critics argue that PCSR is flawed, largely because its advocates are said to naïvely claim that MNCs are motivated by something other than self-

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<sup>14</sup> The authors would like to emphasize that the company itself has not confirmed these strategic motivations.

interest and market considerations (Rhodes & Fleming, 2020; Whelan, 2012). While we would emphasize that PCSR theory was never so simplistic as to ignore market-driven reasons for corporate engagement with social issues (Scherer et al., 2013), our results strongly suggest that the engagement of vaccine-producing companies was indeed *primarily* driven by instrumental reasons. These results strengthen the position of the PCSR sceptics.

We argue, however, that the situation is more nuanced than it might at first seem. Our research results clearly indicate that market-based approaches alone are insufficient to fully explain pharmaceutical companies' behaviour in response to COVAX. We suggest that additional motives are needed to more fully explain why companies engage in PCSR. We point to de Bakker et al. (2019) who question why companies would adopt MSI standards—such as those of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC)—which is another way of acting politically. They argue it would be naïve to assume that the instrumental business case logic does not play a major role when explaining company engagement in the adoption of private governance schemes. However, they also argue that it would be equally naïve not to employ other theoretical perspectives that might provide additional explanatory factors for company engagement in the creation of private governance (de Bakker et al., 2019). These authors suggest that *political-institutional approaches* acknowledge that companies mostly seek to advance their self-interest, but they can also be conceptualised as embedded in their social and institutional context, including societal expectations of responsible business conduct, which can influence their actions and be something to which they need to adapt in order to maintain legitimacy (Bartley, 2007).

The *political-institutional perspective* helps us understand why *no* company with a viable Covid-19 vaccine could afford to ignore COVAX entirely: societal expectations regarding corporate responsibility of pharmaceutical companies have increased in recent decades. Acting contrary to those expectations would result in a loss of legitimacy in the eyes of relevant stakeholders (Access to Medicine Foundation, 2021; Leisinger, 2009) and could

jeopardize their social license to operate (Demuijnck & Fasterling, 2016). Access to medicine has become a notably prominent issue (Leisinger, 2009) and stakeholders including investors have been paying close attention to pharmaceutical company performance on this dimension, as multiple interviewees noted. Moreover, as the number of companies engaging with COVAX increased, isomorphic pressures on the remaining companies arguably also increased, to which they ultimately responded by engaging as well, to preserve legitimacy. After several pharmaceutical companies—some with an authorized vaccine, others with candidates still in development—had pledged millions of vaccine doses to COVAX, engaging with COVAX had become the norm. Contrary to their most vigorous sceptics who claim that PCSR scholars ignore the self-interest of companies (Rhodes & Fleming, 2020), Scherer et al. (2013) are well aware of these tendencies. They argue that in order to maintain their social license to operate, companies would first try to manipulate public opinion by PR efforts and by accepting social standards (in the context of Covid-19: not selling the vaccines for unreasonably high prices). Only when these attempts proved insufficient, would they engage with stakeholders (i.e., COVAX) employing moral reasoning to effect change for societal benefit (i.e., seek more equitable vaccine access).

Providing more nuance to what happened between COVAX and pharmaceutical companies, in addition to market-based and political-institutional reasons for companies to engage in PCSR, we thus suggest *moral considerations* are also relevant. Our interviewees certainly highlighted moral considerations as a factor in AstraZeneca's response to COVAX [e.g., IN3]. More in this regard has emerged about the Oxford University and AstraZeneca collaboration subsequent to our empirical research (e.g., The Economist, 2021d; Walsh, 2022). It is evident that the Oxford scientists who developed the vaccine were motivated by humanitarian concerns, not least in their insistence that it be sold at cost. This was to ensure the greatest scope for its equitable distribution and was reflected in the price differential, with the AstraZeneca vaccine selling at under \$4 and the Pfizer jab at over \$20. As of December 2021,

2.2 bn. doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine had been delivered, compared with 2 bn. of the Pfizer and 0.5 bn. of the Moderna vaccines. *The Economist* (2021d) concluded in December 2021 that “[b]ecause rich countries increasingly use other jabs, and poor countries mostly use their supply for initial doses rather than for boosters, Astra Zeneca’s vaccine is almost certain to have saved more lives than any other.” It goes on to observe that “Pascal Soriot, AstraZeneca’s boss, has always insisted the decision to make the vaccine was fundamentally altruistic rather than commercial, saying that his children would have killed him if he did not take the chance.” While this narrative has rhetorical appeal, our analysis suggests it should not be taken entirely at face value. Moral considerations are only part of the story.

In our investigation, we identified moral factors on the meso and the micro level that influenced company engagement decisions. Some pharmaceutical companies have made it a central part of their strategy and culture (meso-level) to contribute to fair global access to medicines (e.g., Novartis, Johnson & Johnson). Moreover, micro-level CSR approaches (focusing on individuals and on micro-politics within companies) appear to be relevant to understanding why, in addition to instrumental reasons, some companies have focused on the issue of fair access and why some (not necessarily the same) companies have engaged with COVAX to a stronger degree than others (Acosta, Acquier, & Gond, 2019; Maak, Pless, & Voegtlin, 2016). Maak et al. (2016) discuss CEOs’ responsible leadership styles in relation to political CSR and conclude that CEOs with a social-welfare orientation are more likely to follow an integrative responsible leadership style, leading to a higher level of company engagement in political CSR.

With COVAX, various interviewees (e.g., BUS6) reported that the inclinations of CEOs and executive teams towards the issue of global equitable access and corporate responsibility made a significant difference. As one interviewee stated: “I think there are examples where it took CEOs of manufacturers getting involved with their own team to say, ‘make this damn thing happen’” [IN2]. A business representative highlighted that the “commitment to global health”

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by some pharmaceutical industry executives “is incredible”, ultimately driving their company’s commitment to equitable vaccine access [BUS6]. We conclude that the moral convictions of individual managers towards global health have been an important factor in the engagement of some companies with COVAX. These findings also contribute to explanations of why companies engage in PCSR more generally, supporting existing theory in suggesting that the moral inclinations of CEOs (and other business leaders) play an important role in whether and how companies engage with PCSR (Acosta et al., 2019; Maak et al., 2016).

Thus, our research of COVAX contributes to theory on why companies engage in PCSR in general. While we agree with PCSR sceptics that it would be naïve not to see companies as driven by self-interest, we also suggest that it is equally naïve to attempt to explain firm behaviour with market-based approaches exclusively. Adding further evidence to existing suggestions by scholars such as de Bakker et al. (2019) and Maak et al. (2016), we argue that institutional as well as moral factors should be included to refine theory on why companies engage in PCSR.

Nonetheless, our research also highlights an important nuance in understanding the role of government in relation to PCSR. Unlike many of the scenarios of weak governments painted by PCSR proponents, there wasn’t a problem of a weak government presence in the pandemic—governments were very much active and strongly engaged—but there was a governance gap at the global level. The failure to provide more equitable access to vaccines via COVAX, the vehicle expressly created to serve this need, reflects in large measure an absence of willingness by governments to look beyond their immediate self-interest (and, arguably, those of their populations). Instead, true to form, they pursued policies of vaccine nationalism. In such a context, we might look to business to do more, just as apparel brands did in embracing the governance regime of the Accord (after facing substantial pressure from activist organizations) when governments had been opposed to stricter building safety laws (Reinecke & Donaghey, 2021). In some ways, the vaccine producing companies might be said to have been responsible

at a country level—meeting their responsibilities in responding to demands for vaccines from country governments (especially their own)—but not responsible at the global level. This points to the importance of PCSR theorizing around when companies might be expected to act on grand challenges (such as a pandemic), relative to the part played by governments, who might be able but unwilling to act.

### **Normative Implications: Can Society Rely on Companies When They Are Needed?**

Our analysis also speaks to normative implications of political corporate social responsibility. The Covid-19 pandemic presented a global emergency and a grand challenge, with millions of casualties and disastrous social and economic consequences. It also revealed the limitations of nation states and existing supra-national institutions in responding to such challenges. More specifically, no strong global institution existed prior to the pandemic that was equipped to deal with global fair vaccine distribution. Accordingly, world leaders helped establish COVAX and asked companies to engage with it. They called on companies to ‘do the right thing’.

Inequitable access to life-saving vaccines is an issue of global fairness with human rights implications (Bachelet 2021). COVAX was created to alleviate, if not eliminate, this unfairness by providing vaccines to countries without the financial means to strike bilateral deals with pharmaceutical companies. As we indicated in the introduction to this paper, taking a PCSR perspective, we assume that global vaccine-producing companies are political actors, that they had a clear responsibility to engage with COVAX and needed to help secure fair access to Covid-19 vaccines. We now return more directly to our initial question; i.e., *have pharmaceutical companies lived up to their responsibilities as corporate citizens and political actors and fulfilled the implied responsibility of fighting inequitable vaccine distribution?*

Our analysis shows that the response of individual companies differed markedly. While Astra Zeneca had engaged comparatively strongly with COVAX, Pfizer and Moderna had engaged to only a limited extent and seemingly reluctantly at that (as of mid-2021). They

preferred to sell their vaccines to the highest-bidding nation states. It would clearly be incorrect to suggest that companies did not engage at all with COVAX. However, from a PCSR perspective, how little some companies engaged with COVAX and the reasons identified for company engagement, must be viewed as disconcerting.

Putting aside for the moment the contractual obligations that in part explain AstraZeneca's behaviour, the reasons for COVAX engagement are predominantly market-based, as we explained (see Figure 5). We heard some but relatively few statements from interviewees suggesting companies had an ethical strategy towards global health, or that they wanted to do "the right thing" [E2], to ensure a need-based allocation to "contribute to global good" [FM3], or had a corporate strategy that does not put profits first [CSO1, FM2, BUS1].

To be sure, our interviewees repeatedly testified that COVAX (during the time of our investigation) was by no means a perfect institution; some of the external hindering factors and company inhibitors we identify made collaboration with COVAX challenging. It was not fully operative until mid-September 2020 due to funding constraints. Vaccine manufacturers could not have waited till then for the additional funding many received from other sources for manufacturing at-risk [BUS1, BUS2, BUS4, E2, FM3, IN3].

Nonetheless, our findings demonstrate that most company engagement with COVAX was *not* consistent with an understanding of a company role as a corporate citizen, with a political responsibility to help address grand challenges in the absence of sufficient capacity to act of the traditional political actors, nation states and global political institutions. It is not that companies failed to engage with COVAX, it is that they could have done so more strongly. Vaccine manufacturers and other pharmaceutical companies could have found ways to publicly voice concern about fair global access to vaccines. Our findings suggest that a self-understanding of companies as political actors that have responsibilities towards global health and need to assist in equitable access to life-saving vaccines was not widespread among pharmaceutical companies during the time of our investigation.

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Early in the pandemic, scholars and practitioners called on pharmaceutical companies to address this problem (e.g., Scholz & Smith, 2020; Yamey et al., 2020). Given what was known from the H1N1 pandemic, high-income nations were expected to monopolize access to the much-needed vaccines (Milne & Crow, 2020). Pharma companies could have encouraged state actors to give greater support to COVAX, including sourcing vaccines through COVAX instead of securing bilateral deals. Subsequent to our data collection, it has emerged that the vaccine-producing companies had considerable power relative to country governments—as an extreme example of a number, it is reported that former Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu called Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla thirty times in an effort to secure additional vaccines (Kuchler, Mancini, & Pilling, 2021). Pharmaceutical companies could have used their power to push back against the vaccine nationalism that militated against supply to COVAX. In Pfizer’s case, with sales of its vaccine at \$36 billion in 2021 (44% of its total sales) and profits doubling to \$22 billion on the back of the vaccine (Pfizer, 2022), many might argue that there was scope for some greater sacrifice of profit to support more equitable vaccine distribution by supplying more vaccines to COVAX.

Our results thus spur a general criticism of PCSR, and this tackles PCSR’s normative background theory, i.e., the Habermasian version of deliberative democracy. In contrast to neo-liberal models of democracy that emphasize nation states as the dominant political actors, deliberative democracy points to a discursive involvement of stakeholders, including corporate actors as corporate citizens in decision-making processes (Scherer & Palazzo, 2007, 2011; cf. Risse, 2004). In this model of democracy, the participation of stakeholders is not only a nice-to-have—it is essential. While the details and problems of corporate engagement in discursive processes are beyond the scope of this paper (and are discussed extensively in the literature on deliberative approaches), our research indicates a more fundamental problem. If companies are generally not willing to participate in this form of democracy—because they lack a self-understanding as corporate citizens with political responsibilities, or because their CSR



measures are dominated by instrumental reasons—it is questionable whether deliberative democracy can work as an alternative form of governance in the first place. In order to make deliberative democracy work, companies need to have a self-understanding as corporate citizens with respective rights and duties.

The failure of companies to engage strongly with COVAX is unlikely to surprise critics of PCSR. Rhodes and Fleming in their stinging critique contend that PCSR has been “hailed by many as a solution to societal problems not dealt with by government” (2020, p. 943), but it actually “reflects both a triumph of neoliberal corporate power and a harbinger of democracy’s demise” (2020, p. 943). As we earlier described, these scholars question a core assumption of PCSR; i.e., a desire for corporations to be involved in “the political process of solving societal problems, often on a global scale” (Scherer & Palazzo, 2007, p. 1110) to secure their own legitimacy (also see Palazzo & Scherer, 2006, 2008). These PCSR’s critics do not accept the narrative of a historic phenomenon where globalization engenders “a transition from voluntary, business-driven, and case-wise philanthropic acts to a long-term politicized collaboration with government and civil society actors” (Scherer & Palazzo, 2007, p. 1111). They reject the notion of moralized corporations, “driven by a concern for the public good that goes beyond the selfish calculations of economic actors” (Scherer et al., 2016, p. 273). Instead, they argue that PCSR fundamentally misrepresents the character of business firms in capitalist systems and question MNC motivations (Rhodes & Fleming, 2020; Whelan, 2012). Referring to Mäkinen and Kourula (2012), they assert that “the assumption that a multinational firm will voluntarily forego the profit motive and undertake governmental duties is tenuous at best” (Rhodes & Fleming, 2020, p. 945).

While we are sympathetic to the normative claim that companies, especially in a transnational setting and in a global emergency, should assume the role of political actors with corresponding responsibilities, our findings are discouraging. Even with the biggest global health and social crisis of the last 70 years or so, the most relevant companies in this scenario

did not strongly engage with the global political issue of equitable access to vaccines nor demonstrate much of an understanding of being corporate citizens. Their engagement with COVAX, when not strongly driven by legal obligations (AstraZeneca), remained largely peripheral and motivated by market-based instrumental reasons and not a sense of moral and political responsibility.

### **Implications for Civil Society and Policy Makers**

The global inequitable distribution of Covid-19 vaccines as of mid-2021 posed a classical collective action problem in that the self-interested behaviour of pharmaceutical companies combined with the self-interested behaviour of individual (particularly the richer) countries did not result in an efficient and fair vaccine allocation. Public policymakers as well as companies could have learnt from displays of vaccine nationalism during previous pandemics. According to McAdams et al. (2020, p. 1), the ideal system is one in which “manufacturers would openly share patents and manufacturing technology and adopt transparent, non-profit pricing; manufacturing would be globalized; and countries worldwide would pool funding to buy and allocate vaccines for everyone who needs them, free at the point of care.” This is unlikely to emerge automatically and market forces will inevitably disappoint when it comes to providing fair distribution.

A new globally-applicable regulatory framework (e.g., sales and purchase regulations for Covid-19 vaccines) could compensate for the lack of market coordination and ensure that groups are vaccinated worldwide according to their priority ranking (with healthcare workers as the first priority group worldwide—see section 1). However, due to a global governance gap—the lack of an institution that could create and ideally enforce hard laws (Eberlein, 2019)—this regulatory framework seems unlikely to emerge.

Moreover, the pharmaceutical industry in itself faces a collective action problem. It is financially beneficial for individual companies to sell vaccines mostly to the highest-bidding countries and only partially engage with COVAX. Nonetheless, these profit-maximization

strategies of individual companies in a global emergency have the capacity to jeopardize the reputation of the entire industry (Scholz & Smith, 2020) and could lead to regulatory interventions (The Economist, 2021c)—a bad scenario for all pharma companies. For example, the unfair access to vaccines and the tendency of companies to sell to the highest bidder spurred the debate on IP waivers, a major threat to the industry (Gurgula, 2021).

One solution could be *private governance*; i.e., collective arrangements “in which private actors are directly involved in regulating” (Pattberg, 2005, p. 591), by creating standards for business conduct. Private governance is viewed as a promising addition to the governance mix, particularly in the face of global governance gaps (Baumann-Pauly, Nolan, van Heerden, & Samway, 2017; King, Prado, & Rivera, 2012). If the relevant actors collectively agree on effective rules of the game to address the underlying problem, and if the implementation of these rules is sufficiently monitored and sanctioned, they would establish a new level playing field in which the companies could create a positive societal impact without any individual company losing competitiveness (Kobrin, 2009; Lyon et al., 2018).

In the context of access to Covid-19 vaccines, as well as future global emergencies, vaccine manufacturers could define industry rules to encourage global fair access to vaccines (e.g., selling limitations). This soft law regime could be created by industry organizations (e.g., IFPMA), but should rather be deliberated through a multi-stakeholder process to increase the legitimacy of such a regime. This would be following a process similar to that of the Forest Stewardship Council (Mena & Palazzo, 2012; Scherer et al., 2006; Scherer et al., 2014). Extant research on collective private governance suggests that public policymakers could support this process by organizing public forums where the relevant stakeholders can engage with each other, and should carefully rework regulations (e.g., antitrust laws) that might inhibit collective private governance in the pharmaceutical industry (Orbach, 2020).

### **Managerial Implications for Improving COVAX**

An improved COVAX should be available for future pandemics as a primary point of contact for companies. Drawing on our research, we make four suggestions for the improvement of COVAX.

First, initial funding should be secured in advance of potential future pandemics to make COVAX functional immediately following a new outbreak. Second, COVAX should become a “one-stop-shop” for companies to facilitate company engagement with COVAX. Eliminating the need for three individual contracts for R&D funding, vaccine procurement, and dose allocation with separate organizations, these complex structures could be simplified by necessitating only a single agreement.

Third, processes should be streamlined to reduce the level of bureaucracy, particularly for companies, but also for other actors involved. As our research suggests, companies appreciated COVAX for the various services it provided (see section 3). However, our data also indicates that companies perceived the institution as too bureaucratic. Company representatives were “going bananas with this. I have doses set aside, right? And I’m hanging onto them here internally, making sure that they don’t go into the for-profit pool, for which there is more than enough demand, and I’m not able to just get the basic paperwork sorted out with COVAX so that we can actually ship them over” [BUS7].

Fourth, the stakeholder inclusion criteria should be reconsidered—closer contact with representatives of pharmaceutical companies and civil society organizations could help COVAX make more informed decisions about partnerships and agreements with vaccine manufacturers. A careful revision of the COVAX governance structure to involve vaccine manufacturers more directly should be considered. As of mid-2021, pharmaceutical companies were merely represented indirectly in the COVAX governance structure, via industry associations.

## **Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

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A strength of our research was that it was conducted in real time, as events were unfolding. As such it was less subject to possible faulty recollections of events or efforts to rewrite history that might have arisen in later data collection. Nonetheless, it entailed inherent limitations. During the data collection, some companies' engagement with COVAX shifted. Also, since it coincided with critical phases of vaccine distribution, some key stakeholders were unavailable for interview. Even though we worked hard to reach a wide range of relevant stakeholders (contacting 74 stakeholder representatives between the end of February and mid-May 2021), we were (only) able to secure interviews with 21 internal and external COVAX stakeholders.

Moreover, our research is inevitably subject to the standard limitations of qualitative research, including the representativeness of our relatively small sample (though we were careful to secure interviews with people who we believed could best represent an organization's views regarding COVAX as well as share their own perspective) and, within the context of semi-structured interviews, subject to potential biases. The representativeness of our media analysis is another potential concern, though our approach was consistent with prior research and the media chosen were both highly impactful and influential as opinion leaders for other media.

Nevertheless, building on the multiple data sources, we are confident we reached theoretical saturation during data analysis. We believe further research could address some of these methodological limitations and build on this initial base by employing alternative data collection processes and analytic approaches. While it was not the aim of our explorative qualitative investigation to clearly identify causal mechanisms, we hope that our research enables further research to do so by employing appropriate quantitative methods.

A potentially fruitful direction for further research could also be to explore the triangular business-government-society dynamic in COVAX, which could enrich understanding of the business-and-society relationship in COVAX engagement and as it informs PCSR theorizing. More specifically, given the advancement in the development of

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Covid-19 vaccines by a more diverse set of manufacturers in comparison to our data collection timeframe, future research may be able to provide additional insights into differential engagement in COVAX and account for the influence of different governmental regimes.

Future research could thus build on our initial investigation to further contribute to a better understanding of company engagement with COVAX and multi-stakeholder partnerships more generally, as well as access to medicines. The profound significance of Covid-19 and how companies responded to it, for both the business-and-society field and for society itself, is in itself a call for further research.

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**TABLES**

Table 5: Overview of approved Covid-19 vaccine candidates<sup>15</sup>

<i>Company Name(s)</i>	<i>Vaccine candidate</i>	<i>Funding information</i>	<i>Authorization</i>	<i>Number of doses distributed in total (as of 31 May 2021)<sup>16</sup></i>	<i>Number of doses committed to COVAX</i>	<i>Access to medicine Index 2021</i>
<i>Pfizer / BioNTech</i>	BNT162b2/ COMIRNATY Tozinameran (INN)	Pfizer did not accept funding from BARDA, BioNTech received \$546M US from EU and German government	FDA: 11.12.2021 EMA: 21.12.2020 WHO: 31.12.2021	368.68 million doses administered (as of 31 May 2021)	40 million (agreement on 22.01.2021)	Pfizer: Rank 4; BioNTech: not included
<i>AstraZeneca / University of Oxford</i>	AZD1222	AstraZeneca received funding from US government, UK government, CEPI and Gavi (over \$1,9Bn US)	EMA: 29.01.2021 WHO: 15.02.2021	49 million doses administered (31 May 2021)	Pledged 170 million doses; 550 million through Serum Institute of India (agreement on: 18.12.2020)	Rank 7
<i>Moderna</i>	mRNA-1273.351	Moderna received initial R&D funding from CEPI as well as \$2.48Bn from US government	FDA: 18.12.2020 EMA: 06.01.2021 WHO: 30.04.2021	149.45 million administered (31 May 2021)	Pledged 500 million doses (agreement on 03.05.2021)	Not included
<i>Janssen (Johnson &amp; Johnson)</i>	Ad26.COV2.S	Received \$1.5Bn from US government	FDA: 27.02.2021 EMA: 11.03.2021 WHO: 12.03.2021	14.14 million administered (31 May 2021)	Pledged 500 million doses (agreement on: 18.12.2020)	Rank 3

<sup>15</sup> Source: <https://www.gavi.org/sites/default/files/covid/covax/COVAX%20Supply%20Forecast.pdf> (April 7th 2021 report; accessed 27th May 2021).

<sup>16</sup> Source: <https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/covid-vaccine-doses-by-manufacturer?tab=table&time=earliest..2021-05-31> (accessed 3 March 2022). All individual administered doses (= vaccine doses injected into people’s arms) are counted, not accounting for vaccination protocols that require multiple vaccinations.

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<i>Serum Institute of India</i>	Covishield (ChAdOx1_nCoV-19)	Unknown	WHO: 15.02.2021	unknown	Pledged 1.1 Bn doses of AstraZeneca or Novavax vaccine (agreement on: 29.09.2020)	Not included
<i>Sinopharm (Beijing Institute of Biological Products Co., Ltd. BIBP)</i>	SARS-CoV-2 Vaccine (Vero Cell), Inactivated (InCoV)	Unknown	WHO: 07.05.2021	2.83 million administered (31 May 2021)	Negotiations, but no formal agreement (as of 31.05.2021)	Not included



Table 6: Timeline of company engagement with COVAX

Date	Event
24 April 2020	Access to Covid-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator launched
30 April 2020	AstraZeneca and Oxford University sign agreement for the development and distribution of vaccines
<b>May 2020</b>	<b>Countries start signing advance purchase agreements with vaccine manufacturers</b>
21 May 2020	AstraZeneca mentions engaging with Covax in corporate press release
<b>04 June 2020</b>	<b>First Covax AMC: AstraZeneca signs \$750m agreement to support the manufacturing, procurement and distribution of 300 million doses of the vaccine</b>
04 June 2020	AstraZeneca and SII reach licensing agreement for manufacturing additional vaccine doses for low and middle-income countries
26 June 2020	Covax mentioned by name for the first time in WHO news section
09 July 2020	Covax calls for nomination of experts to advise on Covid-19 vaccine candidates
15 July 2020	75 countries submit “Expressions of Interest” to engage with Covax as self-financing members
<b>21 Sept 2020</b>	<b>64 high-income countries formally join Covax; funding a gap of around 1.3 billion US\$ to secure vaccines for low- and middle-income countries</b>
<b>29 Sept 2020</b>	<b>SII pledges to produce 100 million AstraZeneca and 100 million Novavax vaccine doses for Covax in 2021</b>
<b>28 Oct 2020</b>	<b>Sanofi and GlaxoSmithKline pledge 200 million doses of their vaccine to Covax, 300 million doses to the EU and up to 600 million doses to the US</b>
29 Oct 2020	Moderna in talks with Covax to work out a tiered pricing model
09 Nov 2020	Positive interim data from Pfizer/BioNTech Phase III clinical trial
16 Nov 2020	Positive interim data from Moderna Phase III clinical trial
23 Nov 2020	Positive interim data from Oxford/AstraZeneca phase III clinical trial
15 Dec 2020	WHO in talks with Pfizer regarding global allocation of vaccines
<b>18 Dec 2020</b>	<b>Covax reaches additional agreements with AstraZeneca and Johnson&amp;Johnson to secure a total of nearly 2 billion vaccine doses.</b>
06 Jan 2021	India issues an export ban for SII’s AstraZeneca shots for several months; intending to vaccinate its own population first
20 Jan 2021	The African Union reaches agreements with SII, AstraZeneca, Pfizer and J&J for a total of 270 million vaccine doses
<b>22 Jan 2021</b>	<b>Covax reaches advance purchase agreement with Pfizer/BioNTech for up to 40 million doses</b>
<b>3 Feb 2021</b>	<b>SII agrees to provide 1.1 billion doses of AstraZeneca and Novavax vaccines to Covax</b>
19 Feb 2021	Novavax pledges 1.1 billion vaccine doses of its vaccine to Covax
<b>24 Feb 2021</b>	<b>Covax kicks off its global rollout of vaccine doses</b>
<b>03 May 2021</b>	<b>Covax signs advance purchase agreement with Moderna to secure up to 500 million vaccine doses</b>
<b>06 May 2021</b>	<b>Covax reaches advance purchase agreement with Novavax to secure 350 million vaccine doses</b>

*Table 7: Overview of interviewees*

<b>Interview</b>	<b>Group</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Group Description</b>
<b>Bus1</b>	Business/ Business Association	Head of Global Vaccines Program	Companies in the pharmaceutical industry, vaccine manufacturers, and industry representation groups.
<b>Bus2</b>	Business/ Business Association	General Director	
<b>Bus3</b>	Business/ Business Association	Public Affairs Head	
<b>Bus4</b>	Business/ Business Association	Head of Global Market Access	
<b>Bus5</b>	Business/ Business Association	Vice President of Global Program	
<b>Bus6</b>	Business/ Business Association	President of Global Vaccines Program	
<b>Bus7</b>	Business/ Business Association	Head of Global Policy Strategy	
<b>Bus8</b>	Business/ Business Association	Head of Global Public Health	
<b>CSO1</b>	Civil Society Organisation	Researcher to the Executive Director	Key employee of organizations representing the interests of civil society in relation to COVAX
<b>CSO2</b>	Civil Society Organisation	Advisor	
<b>E1</b>	Expert	Member of a COVAX Task Force	Expert regarding the planning, establishment and operations of COVAX.
<b>E2</b>	Expert	CEO & Founder of a consultancy firm in the healthcare sector	
<b>FM1</b>	Funding Member	Senior Health Economist	Representatives of organizations that fund COVAX's
<b>FM2</b>	Funding Member	Head of Development and International Cooperation	

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<b>FM3</b>	Funding Member	Deputy Director, Office of Health	activities and that are involved in decision-making
<b>FM4</b>	Funding Member	Director, Health Products, Programs, and Markets	
<b>IN1</b>	Institutional Member	Director and Strategic Advisor to the CEO	Representatives of organizations that have led the set-up of COVAX as well as ensured operational functioning
<b>IN2</b>	Institutional Member	Deputy Director Of Operations	
<b>IN3</b>	Institutional Member	Director, Vaccines	
<b>IN4</b>	Institutional Member	Director of Business Development	
<b>IN5</b>	Institutional Member	Covid-19 Vaccine Access Coordinator	

**FIGURES**

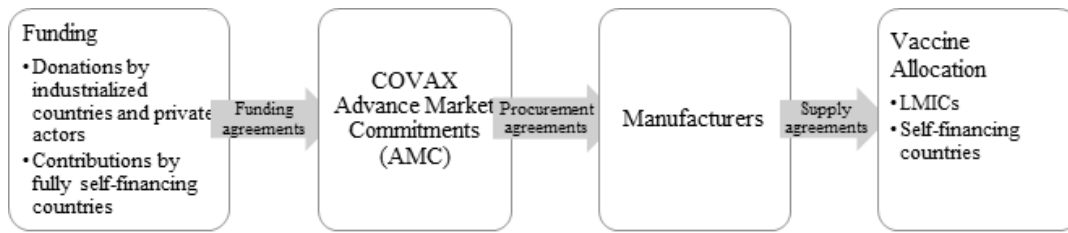


Figure 4: COVAX funding and allocation mechanism (Source: Gavi, 2021)

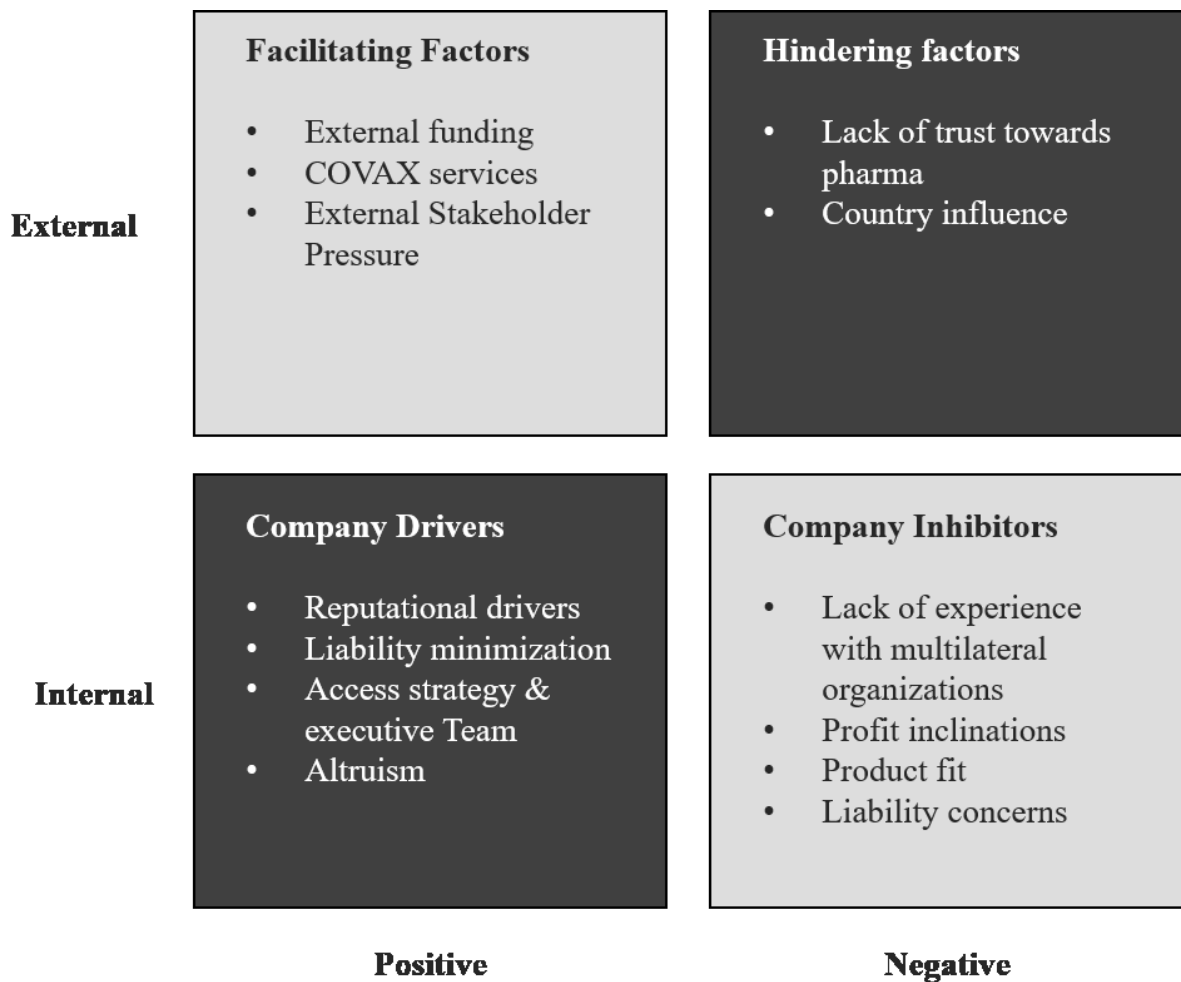


Figure 5: Factors influencing pharmaceutical company engagement with COVAX

**APPENDIX—MEDIA ANALYSIS ARTICLES**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Publisher</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Title</b>
FP1	FiercePharma	31.07.2020	Pfizer, BioNTech keep COVID vaccine deals rolling with 120M-dose Japan pact
FP2	FiercePharma	11.08.2020	Coronavirus tracker: Sinovac unveils midstage vaccine data; Daewoong OK'd to test tapeworm med against virus
FP3	FiercePharma	26.10.2020	Uğur Şahin
FP4	FiercePharma	28.10.2020	Sanofi, GSK to provide 200M coronavirus vaccines to COVAX for equitable distribution
FP5	FiercePharma	30.10.2020	COVID-19 tracker: Regeneron's antibody cocktail hit by safety concerns; Novo's Rybelsus emerging from pandemic slump
FP6	FiercePharma	12.11.2020	Generics players join pledge to rapidly scale access to COVID-19 drugs. But will pharma sign on?
FP7	FiercePharma	12.11.2020	Johnson & Johnson confident in 1B dose goal for COVID-19 vaccine next year, looking ahead to 2022
FP8	FiercePharma	16.02.2021	U.K. inspects AstraZeneca vaccine partner's India manufacturing, setting stage for supply boost
FP9	FiercePharma	18.02.2021	Novavax, coronavirus shot data in hand, strikes an eye-popping supply deal with global vaccine consortium
FP10	FiercePharma	22.02.2021	AstraZeneca's Indian COVID-19 vaccine partner told to prioritize local supplies: CEO
FT1	Financial Times	06.03.2020	The \$2bn race to find a vaccine
FT2	Financial Times	09.04.2020	Transcript: Bill Gates speaks to the FT about the global fight against coronavirus
FT3	Financial Times	09.04.2020	Bill Gates urges rich countries to fund coronavirus vaccine search
FT4	Financial Times	28.04.2020	
FT5	Financial Times	05.05.2020	Will poor countries get the coronavirus treatments they need?
FT6	Financial Times	14.05.2020	Why vaccine 'nationalism' could slow coronavirus fight
FT7	Financial Times	29.05.2020	GSK sets sights on production of 1bn vaccine booster doses
FT8	Financial Times	23.07.2020	Rich country vaccine rush threatens supply security
FT9	Financial Times	23.07.2020	Lloyd's of London to offer Covid-19 vaccine insurance
FT10	Financial Times	19.08.2020	Rich countries urged to join vaccine facility
FT11	Financial Times	25.08.2020	Covid vaccine strategy must consider need as well as wealth
FT12	Financial Times	02.09.2020	'Vaccine nationalism' delays WHO's struggling Covax scheme
FT13	Financial Times	16.09.2020	Vaccine fairness will make us all safer
FT14	Financial Times	24.09.2020	Frontrunners open gap in global race for virus vaccine
FT15	Financial Times	07.10.2020	FT Health: Fighting vaccine nationalism
FT16	Financial Times	09.10.2020	
FT17	Financial Times	10.10.2020	China joins WHO initiative to offer 2bn inoculations
FT18	Financial Times	13.10.2020	China has broader aims with vaccine diplomacy
FT19	Financial Times	22.10.2020	Poor countries flex collective muscle to procure drugs

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FT20	Financial Times	22.10.2020	Are we ready for the next pandemic?
FT21	Financial Times	23.10.2020	How much will a Covid-19 vaccine cost?
FT22	Financial Times	29.10.2020	GSK on course to hit forecast after standard vaccine boost
FT23	Financial Times	30.10.2020	Vaccine bond sale raises \$500m to fund immunisation programmes
FT24	Financial Times	30.10.2020	Vaccine bonds: capital idea
FT25	Financial Times	16.11.2020	The pandemic crisis that's going to waste
FT26	Financial Times	19.11.2020	There is a way to keep America globally engaged
FT27	Financial Times	21.11.2020	Now we need to vaccinate the world
FT28	Financial Times	23.11.2020	G20 vows to ensure global vaccine supply
FT29	Financial Times	23.11.2020	How the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine works and why it matters
FT30	Financial Times	11.12.2020	Sanofi/GSK delay vaccine rollout and Australia ditches trial
FT31	Financial Times	14.12.2020	Patently unfair business of Covid vaccines
FT32	Financial Times	20.12.2020	Anxiety clouds China's rush to vaccinate parts of the world
FT33	Financial Times	21.12.2020	China charm offensive poses threat to confidence in jabs
FT34	Financial Times	22.12.2020	Opacity dogs Chinese and Russian Covid vaccines
FT35	Financial Times	14.01.2021	Letter: West's vaccine rollout must not ignore needs of poorer nations
FT36	Financial Times	21.01.2021	Unequal vaccine access will return to haunt the rich
FT37	Financial Times	21.01.2021	Low-income countries trail in global vaccines race
FT38	Financial Times	25.01.2021	Vaccine delays pose global recovery threat
FT39	Financial Times	26.01.2021	Davos highlights: European leaders urge Biden to extend efforts to reignite international co-operation
FT40	Financial Times	28.01.2021	The struggle to defuse the global vaccine conflict
FT41	Financial Times	29.01.2021	The west's vaccine myopia
FT42	Financial Times	30.01.2021	Global co-operation is needed to beat the virus
FT43	Financial Times	02.02.2021	African countries look beyond west for vaccines
FT44	Financial Times	03.02.2021	Lessons from the pandemic
FT45	Financial Times	04.02.2021	Co-operation will help get jabs to the poorest
FT46	Financial Times	06.02.2021	The global race between vaccines and mutations
FT47	Financial Times	11.02.2021	Letter: West's vaccines policies smack of neocolonial hypocrisy
FT48	Financial Times	12.02.2021	A race to vaccinate the developing world
FT49	Financial Times	12.02.2021	Iran vaccine drive entangled in geopolitics
FT50	Financial Times	13.02.2021	Covax challenges exposed as poorer countries fall behind on jabs
FT51	Financial Times	17.02.2021	The world's biggest test of co-operation
FT52	Financial Times	19.02.2021	Macron calls for urgent supply of Covid vaccines to poorer nations
FT53	Financial Times	19.02.2021	G7 leaders vow to boost vaccine supplies to developing world
FT54	Financial Times	20.02.2021	G7 leaders pledge world vaccine boost
FT55	Financial Times	24.02.2021	Ghana becomes first country to receive free Covax vaccines

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FT56	Financial Times	25.02.2021	J&J vaccine performs well against variant
FT57	Financial Times	26.02.2021	African price for Russia vaccine blunts attacks on 'unethical' west
F1	Forbes	01.04.2020	Coronavirus Business Tracker: How The Private Sector Is Fighting The COVID-19 Pandemic
F2	Forbes	28.10.2020	GSK And Sanofi Pledge 200 Million Vaccine Doses To Covid-19 Alliance
F3	Forbes	12.11.2020	Bill And Melinda Gates Are Giving Another \$70 Million For Covid Vaccines
F4	Forbes	16.12.2020	Report: WHO Likely To Fail In Goal To Deliver 2 Billion Coronavirus Vaccine Doses To 92 Lower-Income Countries By End Of 2021
F5	Forbes	15.02.2021	AstraZeneca/Oxford Covid-19 Vaccine Gets Emergency Approval From WHO
F6	Forbes	18.02.2021	Biden To Offer \$4 Billion To Fund Coronavirus Vaccinations In Developing Countries
F7	Forbes	24.02.2021	Ghana Becomes First Nation To Receive Vaccines From WHO-Backed Covax Initiative
F8	Forbes	25.02.2021	Yellen Urges World's Largest Economies To 'Go Big' On Stimulus
PT1	PharmaTimes	05.06.2020	AZ ramps up supply capacity for COVID-19 vaccine
PT2	PharmaTimes	Oct 2020	Pandemic priorities (published in Oct 2020 Magazine)
PT3	PharmaTimes	28.10.2020	Sanofi and GSK to provide COVID-19 vaccine doses to COVAX Facility
PT4	PharmaTimes	Jan/Feb 2021	Expectations for healthcare in 2021 (published in jan/Feb 2021 Magazine)
ET1	The Economic Times	05.06.2020	AstraZeneca & Serum Institute of India sign licensing deal for 1 billion doses of Oxford vaccine
ET2	The Economic Times	16.07.2020	India Must Push for Fair Share of Covid Vaccines'
ET3	The Economic Times	24.07.2020	India's keen to join WHO- Gavi vaccine alliance in bid to keep supply cost effective
ET4	The Economic Times	04.08.2020	GAVI in talks to make Indian vaccine makers join Covax : CEO Seth Berkley
ET5	The Economic Times	05.08.2020	Lack of Norms Makes Vaccine-making Hard'
ET6	The Economic Times	07.08.2020	Globally, Cos can Produce 2-4 b Covid Vaccine Doses by 2021 End'
ET7	The Economic Times	17.09.2020	India to be a big hub for production of Russian vaccines: Kirill Dimitriev, CEO, RDIF
ET8	The Economic Times	03.11.2020	India now has Rights for Vaccines to Cover its 50% of Population'
ET9	The Economic Times	11.11.2020	Pfizer's coronavirus vaccine isn't expected to reach India anytime soon; US, UK first in line
ET10	The Economic Times	13.11.2020	Pfizer starts talks with Covax facility for equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccine

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ET11	The Economic Times	16.11.2020	Vaccine hoarding could prolong Covid-19 till 2024
ET12	The Economic Times	18.11.2020	India's likely to get access to Moderna's coronavirus vaccine via COVAX facility
ET13	The Economic Times	19.12.2020	IFC invests \$30m in Indian vaccine maker Biological E for future Covid vaccines, routine immunisation
ET14	The Economic Times	30.12.2020	40-50 million Covid vaccine stockpiled by SII, India to get most of it
ET15	The Economic Times	06.01.2021	No Ban on Export of Covid-19 Vaccines'
ET16	The Economic Times	06.01.2021	No Decision Yet on Indemnity Waiver to Vaccine Cos
ET17	The Economic Times	15.01.2021	Covid vaccine makers be liable for adverse effects of jabs
ET18	The Economic Times	20.01.2021	Covid: WHO criticises countries, vaccine companies over bilateral deals
ET19	The Economic Times	20.01.2021	India cites global shortage of Covid-19 vaccines as consensus eludes its TRIPS waiver proposal
ET20	The Economic Times	23.01.2021	View: India's vaccine internationalism is in perfect alignment with its role as a major global player
ET21	The Economic Times	26.01.2021	Tata in talks to launch Moderna vaccine in India
ET22	The Economic Times	02.02.2021	India-made Covishield part of Pakistan jab drive under vaccine alliance
ET23	The Economic Times	17.02.2021	Vaccine diplomacy: 37% doses exported by India are grants
ET24	The Economic Times	17.02.2021	South Africa asks SII to take back 1 mn Covid vaccines
WSJ1	The Wall Street Journal	04.06.2020	AstraZeneca Signs More Coronavirus Vaccine Supply Deals; Under one of the deals, drug maker will receive \$750 million from two foundations to supply 300 million doses for global distribution
WSJ2	The Wall Street Journal	02.09.2020	Rich Nations Snap Up First Vaccine Doses
WSJ3	The Wall Street Journal	25.11.2020	New Covid-19 Vaccines Stir Hope for the World's Poor; Promising trial results inspire optimism in the developing world, which could yet become a reservoir for the virus for years to come
WSJ4	The Wall Street Journal	24.12.2020	Who Made the Vaccine Possible? Not WHO
WSJ5	The Wall Street Journal	07.01.2021	South Africa Fast Tracks Regulatory Approval to Secure Covid-19 Vaccines; Low- and middle-income countries are expected to emulate the move to expedite getting shots to at least some at-risk citizens
WSJ6	The Wall Street Journal	07.01.2021	Israel Races Ahead With Covid-19 Vaccines, While Palestinians Wait; The differing pictures raise questions for Israel about its obligations to the West Bank and Gaza
WSJ7	The Wall Street Journal	04.02.2021	Tanzania Rejects Shot Against 'Satanic' Virus



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WSJ8	The Wall Street Journal	15.02.2021	WHO Approves AstraZeneca Covid-19 Vaccine for Emergency Use; Listing clears way for delivery of free shots to developing nations
WSJ9	The Wall Street Journal	16.02.2021	World News: WHO Approves AstraZeneca Shot For Emergency Use
WSJ10	The Wall Street Journal	18.02.2021	World News: Delayed Developing-Nation Shots Risk Extending Crisis
WSJ11	The Wall Street Journal	25.02.2021	World News: Ghana First to Get Doses Under WHO Plan

#### ***5.4 Appendix 4: Crossing the river by finding the stones: What animates actors to engage in creating institutional change?***

Author: Maria Riegler

Manuscript under review at Strategic Organization (current status: under review)

**Abstract:** This article focuses on the forces animating actors to engage in collective organizing efforts towards addressing grand challenges. Drawing from the literature on institutional work, this article explores micro-level dynamics underlying actors' engagement in creating change in a highly institutional environment by means of a single case study of a collective organizing effort aimed at tackling a grand challenge within management academia. Building on its rich empirical data, this article particularly contributes to a more fine-grained understanding of the factors that may be necessary to animate collective action.

**Keywords:** Grand challenges, institutional work, institutional entrepreneurship, microfoundations, scholarship, collective action

#### **INTRODUCTION**

In recent years, voluntary “collective organizing efforts” (Mitzinneck and Besharov, 2019) have been increasingly discussed as a potentially powerful instrument to address grand societal challenges or wicked problems such as the climate crisis, pandemics, or refugee crises (Gray and Purdy, 2018; Grewatsch et al., 2021; Howard-Grenville, 2021). Grand challenges are usually characterized as large-scale, complex issues entailing significant levels of uncertainty that require “coordinated and sustained effort from multiple and diverse stakeholders” (George et al., 2016: 1881). Examples of collective organizing efforts include cross-sector partnerships (de Bakker et al., 2019), strategic environmental alliances (Bowen et al., 2018; Lin and Darnall, 2015), social movements (Reinecke, 2018; van Wijk et al., 2013), as well as local community initiatives (Haugh and Talwar, 2016). If successful, those collective organizing efforts can result

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in the creation of new institutions or in the transformation of existing ones and thereby help address grand challenges (Gehman et al., 2022; Maguire et al., 2004).

This article focuses on a particular grand challenge, namely a “crisis of confidence” in management academia (Banks et al., 2016; Harley, 2019). This crisis is noticeable through “growing disquiet about the lack of value in our research outputs and increasing frustration about the nature of teaching in business schools” (Harley, 2019: 286). More concretely, “[t]his crisis of confidence can be understood as a response to a series of developments, including an apparent lack of practical or academic impact from most published research, a narrowing of focus in the field, increases in unethical behaviour, a downgrading of teaching and increased pressure in both publishing and teaching.” (Harley, 2019: 286). Like many complex social and environmental problems the literature refers to as grand challenges, the current crisis in management academia is “too multifaceted and complex for a single individual or organization to address” (Gray et al., 2022: 2).

The “rigor-relevance” debate (i.e., the debate “between business scholars who are concerned with producing work that is rigorous and scholars that are more concerned with work that is relevant” (Gulati, 2007: 775)) has gone on for decades (Carton and Mouricou, 2017; Gulati, 2007; Kieser and Leiner, 2009). However, in recent years, discussions of the impact of management research both on business as it is practiced and on society as a whole have intensified (Brabet et al., 2021; Davis, 2015; Harley, 2019; Jarzabkowski et al., 2021; Tourish, 2020). Criticism towards management academia focuses on its perceived low impact on business practice as well as on solving societally relevant issues on the one hand (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2013; Biggart, 2016; Hoffman, 2021; Williams et al., 2021) and on negative impacts of the high pressure to publish on the mental health and wellbeing of scholars on the other hand (Bothello and Roulet, 2019; Miller et al., 2011). Against this backdrop, this article provides

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empirical insights through a single case study of a collective organizing effort aimed at tackling the aforementioned grand challenge within management academia.

While a substantial body of research has formed on various forms of collective action in the sense of institutional work, few empirical investigations thus far have focused on the micro-level dynamics (i.e., personal trajectories, interactions, emotions, values etc.) that help us understand “how and why people become motivated to participate in institutional processes” (Creed et al., 2020: 1; Haack et al., 2020). Similarly, in the emerging research stream on grand challenges, “while scholars are devising tools for coordinating and collaborating, they are not yet looking at the antecedents and consequences of these tools” (Howard-Grenville and Spengler, 2022: 289).

In an attempt to help close the research gap regarding antecedents, this article empirically investigates the micro-dynamics underlying actors’ engagement towards addressing grand challenges through a single case study of a collective organizing effort aimed at addressing a grand challenge within management academia. This article does not build on the assumption that the collective organizing effort has been successful in leading to institutional change. Rather, it explores why the actors involved “work[ed] at creating” institutional change (Lawrence et al., 2009: 10). Drawing from the literature on institutional work and institutional entrepreneurship, this article aims to understand the mechanisms at play in individual people’s engagement in institutional change and to answer the following research questions: What animates individuals to engage in institutional work in the context of a grand challenge? What is the role of emotions and values in individual actors’ engagement in institutional work?

This article makes two contributions. Firstly, building on its rich empirical data, the article expands on Creed et al.’s (2020) conceptual work on how and why people become motivated to participate in institutional processes and provides a more fine-grained perspective regarding different kinds of engagement. While Creed et al. (2020) argue that action is animated by

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individual and collective feelings of responsibility, this article's findings suggest that feeling responsible on its own is not sufficient and the forces animating action are more complex. Secondly, the article contributes to the discussion around "reflective" and "pre-reflective" action in institutional processes (Cardinale, 2018).

This article is structured as follows: Section 2 provides an outline of the theoretical background with a particular focus on actors' engagement in creating and changing institutions in a highly institutionalized setting. Section 3 starts with a brief case description, followed by a description of the methodological approach. In section 4, the findings are presented along the categories and themes identified in the analysis. Section 5 contains a discussion of these findings and future research suggestions.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

Recently, some institutional scholars have called upon researchers to create a deeper understanding of how (and why) actors change the institutions in which they are embedded, thereby acknowledging a "recursive relationship between institutions and action" (Lawrence et al., 2009: 7). In this context, institutions are conceptualized as "products of human action and reaction" (Lawrence et al., 2009: 6). Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) understand institutional work as the actions taken by individuals, groups of individuals, or organizations to change their institutional environment. The context of management academia may be viewed as particularly resistant to change due to its highly institutionalized nature with established practices, routines, and role expectations (Reay et al., 2017).

Battilana et al. (2009) discuss the enabling conditions for institutional entrepreneurship (i.e., the deliberate institutional work resulting in the creation or change of institutions) in a conceptual article. They distinguish two main categories of enabling conditions: field characteristics and actors' social position. Among the field characteristics that may enable institutional entrepreneurship, they discuss crises, field-level problems that may lead to crises,

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and the degree of heterogeneity of institutional arrangements in a field as well as the degree of institutionalization in a given field. Regarding actors' social position, Battilana et al. (2009) suggest that it may influence their perception of a given field as well as their access to the necessary resources for engaging in institutional entrepreneurship, including the actors' legitimacy in the eyes of stakeholders as well as the ability to bridge stakeholders. In addition to this, Battilana et al. (2009) suspect that individual characteristics such as demographic and psychological factors also play an important role. However, they do not discuss what might motivate actors to become institutional entrepreneurs.

Zilber (2007) investigated institutional entrepreneurship in the Israeli high-tech industry in the aftermath of the dot-com crisis. While not focusing on why actors engage in institutional entrepreneurship, her empirical study sheds light on certain institutional microdynamics: the role of sense-making (by telling stories), the complex relations between actors involved, and enabling mechanisms. She concludes that the ability of actors to maintain the balance "between cooperation/contestation and maintenance/disruption" rests on the use of stories to frame and justify their favored institutional change.

Fan and Zietsma (2017), in an empirical analysis of a water management council in British Columbia, explore how actors that are embedded in different institutional logics construct a new logic that builds shared understanding. At the individual level, they identify emotional facilitators (social and moral emotions and emotional agency) that can provoke changes in openness and reflexivity, engagement, and commitment and thereby help (or hinder) the construction of a new logic. While their work on the role of emotions and on individual-level dynamics is important to understanding individual agency in an institutional context, they do not focus on what motivates actors to engage in institutional change.

Creed et al.' (2020) proposed framework, the world of concern, consists of two parts that are interlinked: the embodied world of concern and the shared world of concern. The embodied

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world of concern “is a personal collection of sedimented evaluation of one’s experiences of thriving and suffering, nurture and neglect, attachment and alientation, commitments and antagonisms, and regrets and aspirations” (Creed et al., 2020: 21). A person’s embodied world of concern is her “lens for evaluating institutional arrangements as worthy of embracing, resisting, or rejecting” (Creed et al., 2020: 26). The embodied world of concern therefore guides people’s choices to accept or reject given institutional arrangements. The shared world of concern, on the other hand, “incorporates socially derived understandings of particular social arrangements” (Creed et al., 2020: 28). Through social interactions, people may incorporate other people’s evaluations into their own embodied world of concern. Building on this, the authors suggest that institutions are always at risk of being evaluated and deemed irrelevant or even actively challenged.

While the texts discussed here are relevant to understanding agency in institutional contexts, none of them empirically addresses the question of why actors engage in institutional work. In particular, the micro-dynamics helping us to understand what animates people to engage in institutional work are under-explored (Creed et al., 2020). Thus, I have conducted a single case study to analyze in-depth what animates actors to engage in institutional work.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Following an inductive theory-building approach, the research questions are explored via a single case study focusing on a collective organizing effort to address the crisis in confidence within academia.

### **Case description**

The case analysed in this article is a collective organizing effort within management academia with the aim to make management research more relevant to practice and to society as a whole. The initiative was started in 2014 by a small group of management scholars who were concerned about the direction in which management research was developing and who then

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strategically invited other scholars as well as relevant stakeholders to participate. Their overall concern was that the incentive structures for management academics (regarding hiring and promotion criteria, publications, and success metrics) pushed academics towards producing research that is publishable in academic journals (i.e., usually incremental and theory-driven) but often does not help to solve problems that are relevant to business practice or society as a whole. Through their initiative, the scholars aim to influence accreditation bodies, journal editors, as well as business schools to change the incentive structures in a way that allows for more research that is relevant to business and society.

### **Data collection**

To gain a deeper understanding of what animates actors to engage in institutional work towards changing their institutional environment in a highly institutionalized setting, 16 semi-structured interviews were conducted with the key actors that were instrumental in this particular collective organizing effort in addition to one participant observation at one of the initiative's board meetings. Additional data, such as the minutes of the initiative's board meetings as well as the chronology provided online, were used for contextualization.

--- Table 1 about here ---

In total, 13 hours and 7 minutes of recorded material were transcribed, resulting in 226 pages of single-spaced interview transcripts.

### **Data analysis**

Interview transcripts were coded in line with the Template Analysis approach (King et al., 2018; Knights and Clarke, 2014). As a first step, under the “purposeful suspension of prior knowledge” (Gioia et al., 2012), preliminary inductive coding was conducted for a subset of five interviews. In a second round, the resulting codes were firstly condensed by merging similar codes and deleting codes not relevant to the research question and secondly grouped into overarching themes such as “feeling responsible” (King et al., 2018). These themes were



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created by drawing from Creed et al. (2020) regarding individual actors' motivations (i.e., values and convictions, institutional contradictions, and feeling responsible) and Battilana et al. (2009) regarding facilitating aspects at the individual as well as the field level (i.e., resources and field characteristics).

## **FINDINGS**

In this section, I will present the findings from the single case study, focusing on the elements I have identified as central to understanding the micro-dynamics underpinning the individual actors' engagement – individually and collectively – in institutional work.

--- Figure 1 around here ---

### **Personal background**

In this category, I have grouped the personal experiences and characteristics that may have been crucial in the individual actors' engagement in institutional work, distinguished into three themes: (1) personal trajectories, (2) values and convictions, (3) resources and social position.

#### ***Personal histories***

Some actors' personal histories seem to have been central to their engagement. What the interviewed scholars have in common is that they all are established, tenured academics who have had a successful career. However, the actors' lived experiences differ to a great extent – depending on their academic disciplines, countries of origin and personal background.

Il is a successful scholar, has an immigrant background – although his/her academic socialization occurred in the United States –, and is religious – all of which shaped his/her world of concern. Il's world of concern seemed to encompass scholarship across the entire world. In the interview, Il explained that s/he retired early from teaching and took a full semester to

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reflect on what to do during the following years, which finally resulted in him/her starting the initiative:

“I was not sure exactly how best to spend the rest of my (.) life, during the years while I still can do some professional work. So I took 6 months, actually the full semester, to think about what it is that (.) god may want me to do. So I actually talked to a priest, talked to a priest, once a month from September, October, November, December, four times. That was a very important private conversation. Through his guidance, I thought about all the gifts I had been given my whole life. I felt that [...] my experience in the academic profession, my involvement in the various institutions, (...) the editing of a journal, creating a new association. I have some (.) people, who know me, right, and I have some social capital, so to speak, and some hopefully personal capital, so I felt like I should not just throw all of that away.” [I1]

Other interviewees, while they did not speak about such an intense introspective period, also emphasized that – at the time their initiative started – they were at a stage of their career where the question of purpose and impact had become more relevant than advancing their careers.

“We’re at a stage in our life where none of us are worried about, how do I get promoted. You know, how do I get the next article on my résumé? You know, that is just not – I do not think about that. [...] It really is, all of us are entering this latter part of our careers. How do we have a bigger impact? Is it by publishing that next tweak to a methodology or, you know, a little nuance of a theory. Or can we try and do something more impactful while we’re still in this business?” [I3]

While being critical of the current state of academia, the interviewees at the same time acknowledged that they had become successful through playing by the rules of the academic game:

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“Coming out as a student, I want to get a job, I need to publish articles, I need to publish articles in top journals, you quickly learn what those are, you quickly learn what those journals are interested in. And (.) you develop a standard, a behavior of working on narrow theoretical and methodological substance. And I did that. And I got promoted and I got a job at a good school.”  
[I3]

As mentioned, the actors’ disciplines, the geographic context in which their educations and careers took place as well as the context of their specific schools all contributed to shaping their world of concern. To provide an example, as a European scholar, I9 reflected on fundamental differences between how research works in the European versus the American context: *“I think from the European side, the Europeans had always championed a variety of methodological approaches”* [I9]. This same scholar also noted that it was sometimes difficult to get the other participants to understand his/her perspective: *“there was a dominance of the American view of the world. (laughing) And it was very difficult as a European to (.) try to make the European arguments”*.

### ***Values and convictions***

Linked to the personal histories are certain values and convictions that the actors have formed. They may be malleable and dynamic, but in some statements focusing on their profession, the interviewees seemed to express fairly clearly what mattered to them and what they perceived as their ideals.

One of the main convictions mentioned by interviewees is that business scholarship should be useful to business in practice.

My position is, that (.) we (..) we have to be very relevant, we have to be in touch with the industry, we have to (.) find our problems from what goes on in the real world and study problems, which are (.) either relevant now or better yet (.) will be relevant in the future (.) you know, if you think about climate change and all those kinds of things. So they have to be, they

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have to be relevant problems. There is no way, sitting in the office, to understand (.) what is an interesting topic of research. [...] To me, [...] the whole definition of the business school, it has to be close to business so (.) that is my position.” [I12]

Some interviewees went even further and stated that academia should contribute positively to society: “I have been writing on the notion of we need to start thinking and working on things that are really beneficial. Not just to that next article, but beneficial to (.) society and to business as it’s practiced.” [I3]. This idea, formulated in a slightly different manner, was echoed by others: “we are not prescribing what people should study. We are basically saying that we should free the faculty. Give them freedom to choose what’s important to study, with the caveat that what we study should make the world a better place rather than a worse place.” [I1].

***Resources and social position***

The question of resources – in terms of expertise, reputation, networks, but also financial resources as well as time – was particularly present in the interviews. The interview data suggests that in the very early stage of the initiative’s formation, I1’s reputation was crucial to get other scholars on board because it made them view the activities as highly promising. This sentiment was present in all interviews; the following exemplary quotes underline I1’s importance for the activities in creating the institution at hand.

“People believe that, you know, if [I1] is passionate about this, we could make something happen (laughing) And [s/he] had enough people engaged in the conversation. And (.) you know, (.) having the credibility, people will take [his/her] phone calls, so!” [I5]

“I knew from [I1]’s work and from people who have talked about [him/her] that [s/he] had (.) has a very high reputation in the community. So I knew I was beginning to work with somebody who was, yeah, a thought leader in that space, who really had really wide experience and also potentials.” [I7]

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Even after the very early stages, the reputation and professional network of I1 as well as several other members were perceived as important.

“Had it been a group of younger scholars or (.) mid-career scholars, then it would have been very risky. (.) But most of those people had actually been there, seen it, done that. Made their careers. They could do the speaking on behalf of the others. [...] And their words were likely to carry a bigger weight. And (.) younger scholars would have been in a little bit of jeopardy. Because they are caught up in a system that demands they do certain things” [I9]

Interviewees also stated explicitly that starting with an “elite group” was intentional:

“Well, we felt that, at least as a core group, if you are going to (.) change attitudes and values, and so on, change the culture, it really has to start with an elite group. You know, if you get the president of the Academy talking about why this is important, (.) people will listen, if you ask a junior faculty member to get up on stage and say the same thing, (.) people don’t care (...) It is sad, but (.) that is part of (.) changing attitudes” [I5]

In addition to the actors’ reputation and professional connections, some of them also had prior experience with organizing change (e.g., I2, I7, I11). On the other hand, actors also expressed their frustration about the slow rate of progress. Time was identified as a key constraint by many interviewees: *“I know that some are busy, but will still take the time to do something, and some are just busy and probably never read any emails”* [I8]. Some of the less active members also expressed regret about their low level of engagement, while others seemed to accept not belonging to the core group: *“The other deans tend to be (.) I think (.) as active as I am, come to the meetings, they support it and speak highly of it and so on, but most tend to be so damn busy, that it’s (.) they are not to be trusted to play key roles.”* [I10].

In contrast to this, I1 particularly highlighted a lack of funding options and expertise in public communications as a constraint.

## **Change context**

This section contains the themes that were identified as the relevant context within which the actors decided to engage in creating an institution: (1) institutional contradictions and (2) feeling responsible.

### ***Institutional contradictions***

One central contradiction the interviewees referred to exists between the demands of their jobs that need to be fulfilled in order to advance their career and their desire for their work to have an impact on the “real world”. While the interviewed scholars viewed the existing incentive structures in academia (in relation to publishing and promotions) as problematic – referring to “very deep concern in the profession that we were not actually doing what we were paid to do” [I9], they have also been successful themselves within the structures of the current academic system.

Having worked in academia for decades, the interviewed scholars had been aware of this institutional contradiction for a long time, as exemplified by I1’s account of how s/he learned about it.

“So that was 1993 (.) that was the first time I heard about it, and then (.) [Don Hambrick] was mostly focusing on the relevance (.) question, are we relevant for business. And (.) [...] there were problems we were observing in the papers that people [...] were willing to tweak the data and choose the result they wanted to make a paper look good, (.) and mostly try to get it published. And I saw, there was a lot of conversation, in 2000 things begin to look very bad and becomes like (.) it is a well known (laughing) very well known in the academy at least.” [I1]

The interviewees also explained why the question of having more impact was important to them. Some emphasized that the question of impact was related to the reputation of academia among the media and society as a whole.

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“As dean, I was very familiar with the various stakeholders that are supporting business schools and where the money comes from for supporting business schools and recognized that a lot of our research, much of our research, really does not have an impact and really does not feed back to the stakeholder groups. And (.) also, an observation that the popular press, in the US at least, has gotten pretty negative about research and science and (.) part of that is, you know, a lot of the population does not see any tangible outcomes from the things that we do. And so business schools of all parts of the university should be in a place where they really can have an impact, and (.) make known to the public the value of science, and the value of the research that we do.” [I5]

One interviewee argued that the theory requirement in academic publishing actually hinders progress in research:

“We have to have a new theory or theoretical contribution in every paper we publish instead of solving a problem. [...] The theory requirement in fact has stymied progress in our research, we are forcing the field to stay at a normal science stage. Right? If you are not allowing revolutionary ideas to come in to get a totally new perspective” [I1]

An additional perceived consequence of the existing institutional contradiction concerns the younger scholars. The interviewees were in agreement about the academic system placing particularly strong demands upon young scholars. I1 further expressed his/her impression that the demands placed on young scholars have increased and result both in stress and in a loss of vision in research:

“The young scholars were all talking about how to get published. And they were all beginning to show stress (.) about that. And I just was amazed [...] I remember when I was a young scholar, assistant professor, I was just feeling grateful and just so thrilled that I would be paid to (.) do research that I like. And so, people have lost, seem to have lost that (.) their sense of

(.) purpose and mission and vision in their research and they are now becoming just reacting to this stress of needing to (.) put out one paper, two papers at least a year, right?” [I1]

### ***Feeling responsible***

In the interviews, several scholars expressed that they, as individuals, felt a “moral obligation” [I9] or a “duty” [I1] to their profession. I1 argues that “*in my role as an editor, as a department head, as a senior scholar, I feel that I have a duty to speak out about this problem*”, suggesting a sense of “stewardship” (Creed et al., 2020: 26) for the wellbeing of younger scholars and for the profession as a whole.

This sentiment was echoed by others, such as I13:

“It always was very clear to us, (.) that we were a group of senior scholars, senior academics and we had realized that (.) in particular the junior scholars were somehow (.) a victim of the system. And they could not get out of the system, because as they had to (.) work for their career, and for getting a decent job in academia, they had to play according to the established rules. [...] So (.) we were very conscious of the fact that [...] we were a very privileged bunch of senior scholars who did not have to perform anymore, according to the established and sometimes crazy rules of the game in research and academia, but that we had a responsibility (.) to discuss this crazy system that (.) made everybody become a slave of the system and dependent of the system.” [I13]

I9 did not base his/her argument on status or level of influence, but argued that the moral obligation to act stems from perceiving something as wrong:

“On the one hand, you are very interested in (.) getting something done about something you have been complaining about in your own writing and secondly, most of those people (.) who were asked are very, very busy people. And so (laughs) (.) it is easy to say no, but then again I think you have a moral obligation, to your profession, to try to correct what you perceive to be



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wrong. Now it is not everybody in the profession that perceives it to be wrong. [...] But those who believe in a good science, in good methods, those who believe in the relevance (.) aspect. Really did want to make something happen.” [I9]

### **Action**

This section focuses on the actors’ activities in institutional work towards challenging and changing the existing institutional environment in management academia.

### ***Speaking out***

Being confronted with institutional contradictions and feeling a sense of responsibility, the first action for many was to speak out individually, mostly through publishing texts about the problem: *“Before I met [I1] I was writing articles and giving speeches about this. This has been something I have been passionate about for a while”* [I3]. I1 also started his/her activities by writing and talking about the problem: *“And I was not really not thinking what I could do, but I said that this problem is important, so I was focused on writing (.) and talking about it.”* [I1]

### ***Doing something***

While many actors’ awareness about the institutional contradictions had been high for quite some time, their attention was mostly focused on describing the problem. During a conversation at a conference, another scholar suggested to I1 to organize a team of scholars and to engage in institutional change.

“So in those few years, I was just writing, writing, and (...) when [name] said, we should find solutions to the problems, it just kind of, yeah, that’s entirely right, we know the problems now. But how to we fix it? So, the invitation to find solutions to the problem really spoke to me, yeah, very clear and loud” [I1]

I14, the scholar who, according to I1, made the suggestion that started it all stated that it was a pure coincidence that he/she heard I1’s talk about the problems with management academia at

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a conference and later had a conversation with him/her. This same scholar also remembers the suggestion to have been made spontaneously in response to something I1 said. Remarkably, I14, after stimulating the start of the initiative, substantially reduced his/her engagement with it, stating: *“I much prefer to start things and see how, you know, they take off and move on to the next one, uh, rather than kind of follow through and stick and stay in that corner”*.

After some weeks of intense reflection, including talking to a priest, I1 started reaching out to other scholars; first to close academic friends and later to a wider circle of academics and additional stakeholders that were strategically important. I1 described the suggestion made by the other scholar as key to starting the activities.

“I could not say whether or not something else may have come along, but I would have to say if [I14] hadn’t offered the invitation to form a team, I probably wouldn’t have done it. It just never crossed my mind to organize something, I would probably continue to speak, to write, as an individual scholar. (.) That that I could not imagine, that I would (.) alone would do it. I let, the institutional encouragement was [...] very important.” [I1]

For I1, the fear of failing was and continues to be present, but the feeling of responsibility is stronger: “I am very acutely aware that I may not succeed because it is such a huge problem. And so, it’s a 20-year old problem, it’s worldwide, I mean, who am I, you know (laughing) a small person. In this big big big universe. But I said, well, I mean, (..) it just seems to me, to walk away from it doesn’t didn’t seem right. I should at least try.”

Regarding the fear of failing, I1 emphasized worrying about wasting people’s time. However, s/he developed strategies to cope with it, firstly by acknowledging that a “waste of time” would not really be a problem:

“One of my worries is that, if I fail then– not if I fail. If the project fails then (.) we are wasting peoples’ time. But then I said everybody is a mature professional individual. And, and (.) they

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joined because they care about this problem. They would not see this as a waste of time. And if (.) we did feel that way, (.) that'd be it, we'd waste some time. We are wasting time all the time, so (laughing)" [I1]

Secondly, I1 implemented a reflection mechanism in the initiative based on his/her previous experience with starting a new journal: at the end of every year, the participants assess whether or not they are making sufficient progress to continue: *"If at any point we said, there is too much obstacle. We just spin in our wheels, the progress is not sufficient for us to justify continuing to throw our resources into this project. Then we will just stop. So every year we do that"* [I1].

The data suggest that most of the other actors were explicitly invited by I1 to join. I5 describes hearing about I1's activities and actively reaching out to him/her. I1's role as a driving force was described by all interviewees as crucial in getting (and keeping) the initiative going.

"I think, frankly, a good deal of it is [I1] (laughing). Because there have been articles that have been written about the need for relevance (.) over the years, (.) [...], and quite often the articles would basically be (.) a call to action. But there was (.) nothing behind it. And it, there has not been a more organized group that has really done anything about it. [I1]'s background (...) gives [him/her] a lot of credibility (.) to convene faculty from across business schools and internationally, [his/her] ability to convene the group, uhm (.) I think that made a huge difference about why is there greater activity now than before" [I5]

A new challenge for the actors involved was to develop a common vision and to agree on which activities would be important as well as helpful to solving the problem they had defined. However, the data suggests that the actors most invested into a given topic were also the ones doing most of the work, while the rest of the actors provided feedback and were content with the direction in which the initiative was developing. In addition to this, the actors in this case

did not engage in the sense of realizing a clear institutional vision, but rather in the sense of perceiving a problem as important and exploring ways towards a solution.

“What we have a common agreement on is that this is an important problem that needs solutions. [...] That we should do something about it. As far as what solution that is, I don’t think anybody started with any idea. I certainly did not. And that is why, [...] it really is like, (.) you see, evolving, right? So crossing the river by finding the stones is a very good metaphor to see where we are going [...]. We are working together, to search the solutions [...]. The connection (.) is, I mean, is, really is, it is not a designed future, ok, this is not an experiment, we do this and see, this is really more a discovery.” [I1]

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

This research provides empirical insights into why individuals engage in organizing towards addressing grand challenges. Theoretically, this contributes to the debate about institutional microfoundations and the dynamics animating actors to engage in institutional work in a highly institutionalized field through a qualitative in-depth analysis of individual actors’ engagement in creating institutional change within management academia.

This article makes two contributions to the institutional microfoundations debate based on its empirical data. Firstly, the article expands on Creed et al.’s (2020) conceptual work and provides a more fine-grained perspective regarding different kinds of engagement (i.e., “speaking out” vs. “doing something”). Secondly, the article contributes to the discussion around “reflective” and “pre-reflective” action in institutional processes (Cardinale, 2018). Building on its empirical findings, this article suggests a conceptual framework of antecedents of actors’ engagement in institutional work and thereby also contributes to the growing research stream on grand challenges. The relationship (and tension) between the scholars’ own lived

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experience within academia and the desire to change the academic system to provide more opportunities to researchers to address grand societal challenges was investigated in-depth.

Creed et al. (2020: 36) argue that the animating forces behind action are personal and collective feelings of responsibility. The results of this empirical case support this statement. However, the results also suggest that while feeling responsible may be necessary for action, this alone is not sufficient. In this particular case, the “invitation to act” seems to have been central to actors’ engagement in “doing something” vs. “speaking out”, accompanied by a range of enabling conditions including resources and the actors’ social standing (Battilana et al., 2009) as well as a shared understanding regarding the problem. In a different context, Bertels and Lawrence (2016) offered a distinction between discursive and practical action as forms of organizational responses to institutional pressures. The data focusing on individual actor’s engagement analyzed in the current article suggests that, from a process perspective, the form of action may change over time.

In his article on institutional microfoundations, Cardinale (2018) discusses actors’ “pre-reflective” engagement with structure that draws them towards a particular course of action. This article’s findings suggest that the actors indeed were drawn towards a specific course of action that arguably appeared as self-evident to them. As experienced academics, when they faced institutional contradictions, the “obvious” course of action was to speak up and voice their concerns through talks at conferences and through publishing articles. Zooming in, this means that the actors experienced institutional contradictions and – in terms of identifying and articulating their concerns about the perceived problems – engaged in a reflective manner with the given structure. However, in terms of working towards a solution to the perceived problems, the data suggests that the actors initially engaged – at least partly – in a “pre-reflective” manner: using channels and taking actions they were familiar with, they criticized the current academic system as individual scholars. This is very explicit in Il’s account, but was also echoed by

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others. The data suggests that the suggestion by another scholar at a conference to organize a group of scholars triggered I1's reflection about his/her own agency concerning collaborating with others in an effort to change the current structure.

Smets and Jarzabkowski (2013) suggest that in complex institutional environments, the new institutional vision may not be fully formed and actors engage in institutional work "not in the sense of intentionally pursuing a clear institutional 'vision'" (Smets and Jarzabkowski, 2013: 1300). The case analyzed here also seems to support this sentiment: even though the actors involved constituted an elite group that made many intentional strategic choices and became active with the goal to change their institutional environment, their overall institutional vision was not designed from the start. As I1 put it, "crossing the river by finding the stones is a very good metaphor".

### **Limitations and future research**

As all studies, this one comes with limitations. The interviewees were almost exclusively scholars who were experienced with conducting interviews themselves and who appeared to be careful and reflective in their wording. In addition to this, the data suggests that most interviewees kept a certain emotional distance (they generally spoke as if the perceived problems did not affect themselves and – with the exception of I1, who spoke openly about the period of intense introspection before starting organizing – did not show much vulnerability). Before this backdrop, I followed multiple strategies to ensure the validity of the data (i.e., cross-comparisons of different statements within each interview as well as between different interviews; contrasting interview statements with meeting minutes and other published texts). However, the general limitations of elite interviews apply (Harvey, 2011).

In addition to this, this research focused strongly at the individual level, however, as Haack et al. (2020) emphasize, microfoundations are not synonymous with individual-level dynamics. Future research may uncover important processes and variables at other levels of analysis. In

addition to this, the shift from “speaking out” (individually) to “doing something” (collectively) identified in this case study might inspire further process-oriented research focusing on both cognitive and affective aspects animating action.

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*Appendix 4: Crossing the river by finding the stones:  
What animates actors to engage in creating institutional change?*

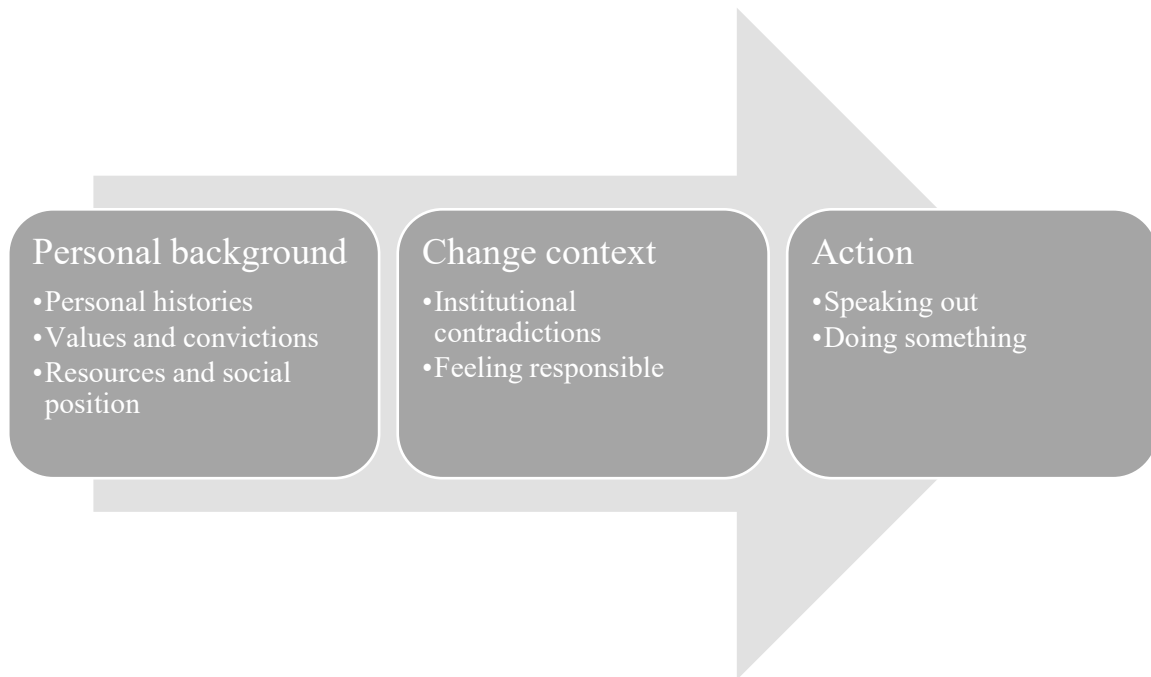
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What animates actors to engage in creating institutional change?*

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**FIGURES**



*Figure 6: Conceptual framework of the factors animating action*

*Appendix 4: Crossing the river by finding the stones:  
What animates actors to engage in creating institutional change?*

**TABLES**

*Table 8: Overview of interviewees*

Interview	Interviewee	Duration
I1	American professor (founding member)	1 hr 12 min
I2	European professor (founding member)	0 hr 52 min
I3	American professor (founding member)	0 hr 40 min
I4	Asian professor (founding member)	0 hr 33 min
I5	American professor (founding member)	0 hr 51 min
I6	European professor (founding member)	0 hr 53 min
I7	European stakeholder/supporter	0 hr 49 min
I8	European stakeholder/supporter	1 hr 01 min
I9	European professor (founding member)	1 hr 06 min
I10	European professor (founding member)	0 hr 54 min
I11	American professor (founding member)	0 hr 55 min
I12	American professor (founding member)	0 hr 36 min
I13	American professor (founding member)	1 hr 00 min
I14	European professor (founding member)	0 hr 43 min
I15	European stakeholder/supporter	1 hr 08 min
I16	European stakeholder/supporter	0 hr 50 min