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Shaping the Processual View of CSR: A Multipartite Sensemaking-Sensegiving Conceptualization

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SHAPING THE PROCESSUAL VIEW OF CSR:
A MULTIPARTITE SENSEMAKING–SENSEGIVING CONCEPTUALIZATION¹

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“The only way to make sense out of change is to plunge into it, move with it, and join the dance”

-- Alan Watts, author

Since Bowen (1953) first argued that businessmen had the responsibility to pursue policies, make decisions, and follow lines of action that are advisable in terms of the goals and values of the wider society, corporate social responsibility (CSR) progressively has grown into a global trend that involves business actors, governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and civil society (Matten & Moon, 2008). Corporations face increasing pressures to take a broader perspective of their corporate purpose, including social and environmental considerations. Consequently, many corporations have adopted the CSR discourse and developed various CSR initiatives, ranging from the design and implementation of codes of conduct to triple bottom line reporting, collaborations with NGOs and U.N. agencies, and increased support for community development programs. For some corporations, the pressures for more responsible corporate behaviors have prompted actual and important changes in their cultures, structures, and daily activities, because they consider CSR as “central to core business activities rather than a peripheral consideration associated with philanthropy” (Bhattacharya, Smith, & Vogel, 2004: 6). Yet in most cases, corporate responses to pressures mainly have resulted in CSR promises and activities that can easily be decoupled from the company’s normal, ongoing activities (Weaver, Trevino, & Cochran, 1999). Potential explanations for the gap between CSR rhetoric and reality include the difficulties managers have in making sense of the CSR concept (Nijhof & Jeurissen,

2006) and the complexities associated with making it operational (Grayson & Hodges, 2004). Until recently, academic and managerial literature provided little guidance for understanding how to translate CSR concerns into managerial understanding and actions.

By the last decade of the twentieth century, the CSR academic field mainly consisted of two research streams of research: a content-oriented, essentially descriptive and normative stream, and an incentive-oriented, more instrumental stream. The first area has generated an abundance of sometimes confusing approaches and terminologies related to the nature and content of CSR and similar concepts (see Garriga & Melé, 2004). As a point of convergence, CSR scholars now concur that CSR essentially involve “actions that appear to further some social good, beyond the interests of the firm and that which is required by law” (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001: 117). They also acknowledge stakeholder theory as the main frame of reference (Carroll, 1991; Windsor, 2006), from which they derive corporations’ obligations to constituent groups other than stockholders and beyond those prescribed by law (Jones, 1980).

The second stream of research focuses more on business motivations for developing and communicating CSR initiatives. In this perspective, corporate demonstrations of responsible behaviors have been shown as constituting potential sources of substantial benefits through the development of positive attitudes towards the corporation and its products (e.g., Ellen, Webb, & Mohr, 2006; Sen, Bhattacharya, & Korshun, 2006), the development of competitive advantages and valuable organizational capabilities (e.g., Porter & Kramer, 2006; Sharma & Vredenburg, 1998), and the support to the long-term financial performance (e.g. Orlitzky, Schmidt, & Rynes, 2003).

Yet issues related to CSR interpretation, implementation, and integration in organizational structures and activities seemed essentially ignored (Lindgreen, Swaen, & Maon, 2009). A more

recent, dynamic, and practice-oriented research stream thus has emerged, with the objective of understanding how CSR unfolds in corporations and what actually triggers organizational engagement in CSR initiatives. Such research features both conceptual developments and empirical investigations, notably those related to the organizational developments required for CSR integration (e.g., Mirvis & Googins, 2006; Zadek, 2004), structuring strategic CSR policies (e.g., Bondy, Matten, & Moon, 2004; Heslin & Ochoa, 2008), and understanding the internal and external factors of social change in organizations (e.g., Aguilera, Rupp, Williams, & Ganapathi, 2007; Basu & Palazzo, 2008; den Hond & de Bakker, 2007).

In this context, some scholars have lately suggested the idea that an organizational sensemaking perspective—which considers how people in organizations collectively grant sense to their environment (Maitlis, 2005)—might produce a more robust conceptual understanding of what guides the CSR initiatives that corporations undertake and thereby generate a better understanding of the largely ignored social and communicative nature of CSR in corporations (Cramer, Jonker, & van der Heijden, 2004; 2006; Nijhof & Jeurissen, 2006). But despite those repeated calls, research efforts in this sense essentially remain fairly scarce. Remarkably however, Basu and Palazzo (2008) recently enhanced understanding of the interpretation processes in CSR-related organizational decision making by adopting just such a perspective. Their proposed process model emphasizes cognitive, linguistic, and conative dimensions of the CSR sensemaking process and identifies subdimensions that characterize and influence the way managers make sense of CSR issues. However, their conceptual effort does not recognize the patterns of interrelationships among various sensemaking dimensions and subdimensions. Furthermore, their model chiefly focuses on intra-organizational actors, without considering how collective processes of sensemaking and sensegiving might occur among and between various

internal and external stakeholders (see Gioai & Chittipedi, 1991; Maitlis, 2005).

Using existing process models of CSR and multidisciplinary literature pertaining to sensemaking and sensegiving processes, we attempt in this paper to offer a more comprehensive understanding of the interpretive and influence processes that characterize the integration, development, and communication of CSR concerns by corporations. We therefore consider CSR from a social constructivist perspective and provide a generic model of how CSR unfolds in contemporary companies, organized by four CSR sensemaking–sensegiving processes that are both interdependent and concomitant: managerial convergent sensemaking, managerial compounded sensegiving, extra-managerial divergent sensemaking, and extra-managerial differentiated sensegiving. We also highlight critical factors that influence the sensemaking and sensegiving processes of the various social actors at play.

In so doing, we contribute to literature and practice in three complementary ways. First, our research extends existing conceptualizations of CSR by considering the role and influence of external stakeholders in the sensemaking–sensegiving processes. Second, we resituate the unfolding of CSR in business organizations according to a dynamic, interpretive, and interactive perspective. Third, we reaffirm the need to adopt a process, multidisciplinary, context-specific research perspective when dealing with the multifaceted CSR construct.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: We next review organizational sensemaking and sensegiving theories and dynamic models, then consider CSR according to this perspective, defining it as an ongoing and multipartite process. We then develop our dynamic model for understanding the development of CSR in organizations. Finally, we discuss the key contributions and some limitations of our work.

SENSEMAKING AND SENSEGIVING PROCESSES IN ORGANIZATIONAL LIFE

The term “sensemaking” has mainly been used in psychology as a metaphor for individual understanding or “meaning making.” Thus, it describes—though sometimes nebulously—an all-encompassing, subjective mental activity by which a person make sense of the self and his or her world (Craig-Lees, 2001). By its very nature, sensemaking is an interpretive process that people use to place equivocal and ambiguous environmental stimuli into defined cognitive schemas,⁴ or mental frames, that allow them to make sense of those stimuli (Starbuck & Milliken, 1988). More specifically, sensemaking derives from symbolic interaction theory (Blumer, 1969), which contends that people behave toward other things and people according to the meanings they have given those people or things. Sensemaking thus emphasizes the temporary and circumstantial nature of the meanings people generate in the face of daily issues, contrastingly with static and objective meanings that people might hold (Luria, 1982). The enactive environment that results from the sensemaking process therefore constantly exists in the state of becoming, and outcomes of the sensemaking processes are both transient and situational.

From Individual to Organizational Sensemaking

Organization scholars move beyond the individual sensemaking process to contend that groups and organizational entities also engage in sensemaking processes (e.g., Schneider, 1997; Weick, 1995). Thus, organizational members make sense of equivocal and ambiguous situations in their

¹According to Markus (1977), schemas refer to the dynamic knowledge and internal structures of specific concepts, entities, and events, which enable people to process and represent incoming information efficiently. They serve as mental maps that people use to orient themselves within their experiential terrain (Weick, 1979).

organization by fitting them into existing schemas or frames of references that these members have, at least partly, developed through past experience and socialization within that organization (Weick, 1995). In addition, organizational members can cope with confusing environmental stimuli by seeking others' interpretations (Volkema, Farquhar, & Bergmann, 1996) or constructing new accounts—which represent discursive social constructions of reality that enlighten or offer interpretations (Antaki, 1994)—which in turn enables them comprehend their environment and act collectively (Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Maitlis, 2005; Starbuck & Milliken, 1988). Organizational sensemaking thus allows organization members and groups to develop commonly shared meanings (Poole, Gioia, & Gray, 1989; Schneider & Reichers, 1983) about key features, such as the organization's meaning, what it does well or poorly, which issues it faces, and how to resolve these issues (Weick, 1995). Through organizational sensemaking, individuals and groups interactively create their social reality, which ultimately becomes the organizational reality (Boyce, 1995).

From Sensemaking to Sensegiving

Sensemaking processes are important in organizational life and strategic decision making processes as they allow determining reference points and suggesting possible outcomes of organizational actions (Fiss & Zajac, 2006). At the upper management level, sensemaking processes thus involve activities such as environmental scanning and issue interpretation, which in turn influence decisions about the projected organizational image (Gioia & Thomas, 1996) and rationales for organizational restructuring, development, or change (Bartunek, Krim, Necochea, & Humphries, 1999; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Gioia, Thomas, Clark, & Chittipeddi, 1994). At the middle management level, sensemaking processes influence the integration of strategic

decisions and policies and the means of coping with new corporate initiatives (Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Rouleau, 2005), as well as how managers construe organizational features and performance (Pratt, 2000; Wagner & Gooding, 1997). Finally, at lower levels of the organization, sensemaking processes dictate how organizational actors can resolve the tensions between social action and the strategic and systemic realities of organizational life (Bean & Eisenberg, 2006).

These strategic aspects of sensemaking processes in organizations result in the situation that organizational life is “full of attempts to affect how others perceive and understand the world” (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007: 57). Members of the organization, at various levels, indeed endeavor to affect others’ sensemaking processes through sensegiving, that is, “the process of attempting to influence the sensemaking and meaning construction of others toward a preferred redefinition of organizational reality” (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991: 442). Sensegiving is concerned with efforts to communicate thoughts about organizational events and features to others, to influence outcomes, and to increase support for its own perspective through suggestive or persuasive language as well as symbolic or emphatic actions (Bartunek et al., 1999; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Rouleau, 2005). Organizational leaders and other internal stakeholders, such as middle managers, directors, and other employees (Maitlis, 2005), all may use sensegiving processes, whether vertically or horizontally.

Even though sensemaking and sensegiving might appear to be singular concepts, the two concepts overlap considerably. Theoretically, we can distinguish between sensegiving and sensemaking at any given moment in time, but in practice, people usually engage in sensegiving processes according to the concomitant sensemaking processes. Just as discourse and action are, sensemaking and sensegiving processes are mutually dependent and represent not two different notions but rather two sides of the same coin (Rouleau, 2005).

From Internal to External Stakeholders' Sensemaking and Sensegiving Processes

Research into sensemaking and sensegiving processes in strategic management and organization literature generally focuses on internal stakeholders, largely forgetting about the interactions with other groups of stakeholders that might be engaged in interpreting and translating corporate initiatives. However, two key contributions emphasize a balance in the role of internal and external stakeholders. First, Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) study strategic change in the academic world, highlighting some micro-processes of social interaction, organizational change, and innovation in organizations by considering the iterative processes of sensegiving and sensemaking between upper management and other organizational groups. By focusing on the initiation phase of an organizational change initiative, they offer a generic stages framework that reveals the sequential and reciprocal cycle of sensemaking and sensegiving between managers and progressively expanding audiences. Second, Maitlis (2005) describes four organizational sensemaking patterns (guided, fragmented, restricted, and minimal) that depict the extent to which leaders and stakeholders attempt to influence one another's comprehension of issues through their sensegiving processes. According to Maitlis, each pattern is characterized by a distinct set of process features and leads to different outcomes in terms of the accounts generated (i.e., unitary or multiple, convergent or divergent) and the activities that follow. Both frameworks thus clearly recognize that various stakeholder groups both make sense of and give sense to issues through their own lenses.

DEFINITION OF CSR FROM A SENSEMAKING–SENSEGIVING PERSPECTIVE

CSR as an Ambiguous and Uncertain Notion

CSR doesn't mean the same thing to every organization and industry. CSR can easily be interpreted as including almost everyone and everything (WBCSD, 2001). CSR issues "vary by business, by size, by sector and even by geographic region" (Business for Social Responsibility 2003). They include concerns and issues related to human rights, people's well-being at work, environmental impacts, business ethics, community investments, governance, and the marketplace (e.g., Maignan & Ralston, 2002). Companies approach and appreciate the CSR concept depending on the context, culture and values that are specific to their organization (Cramer et al., 2004; Van Marrewijk, 2003; Maignan & Ralston, 2002). They comprehend the CSR issues in different ways and assign – through interpretative processes – their own meaning to the confusing CSR concept in order to clarify the motivation that underlies their potential commitments and to make sense of the key societal issues they face (Maignan et al., 2005).

In addition, the complexity of CSR issues forces a consideration of multiple, multifaceted groups of internal and external stakeholders. Stakeholder groups—including owners, investors, customers, suppliers, managers, employees, competitors, the local community, and groups like the government or the media with which the organization engages—tend to be common to all companies, yet the conceptions of what constitutes a responsible company vary across both these groups and individuals (Zyglidopoulos, 2002). Furthermore, stakeholders' CSR expectations are inconsistent (Dawkins & Lewis, 2003) and inexorably evolve over time (Polonsky & Jevons, 2006). As a result, few things are absolute in the CSR realm (Carroll, 1991). CSR issues and organizational practices demand constant reassessments and dialogue between the organization and its stakeholders. This ambiguity and uncertainty characterizing the CSR concept, combined with its stakeholder-oriented and multipartite dimensions, make it especially relevant as a topic to

consider through the lens of sensemaking and sensegiving processes.

CSR as an Ongoing, Multipartite Sensemaking–Sensegiving Process

A CSR implementation might be considered a process of change that takes place through a process of sensemaking (Cramer et al., 2004; Cramer, van der Heijden, & Jonker, 2006). Basu and Palazzo (2008) build on this idea to propose a process model that identifies the CSR phenomenon as an intrinsic part of an organization's character. They further suggest that to study an organization's CSR process, one should focus on two cognitive subdimensions (i.e., identity orientation and legitimacy approach), two linguistic subdimensions (i.e., modes of justifying organizational actions to others and transparency of CSR-related communication), and three conative subdimensions (i.e., instrumental or normative nature of CSR commitments, internal and strategic consistency of commitments, and the responsive posture of the organization to its environment). This conceptualization of CSR extends beyond most content-focused, traditional CSR models and opens paths for research that analyzes the relationships between the organizations' characters and their strategies for engaging with their environments.

Although Basu and Palazzo's (2008) model thus provides an excellent constructive basis for analyzing patterns of interrelationships among these elements, it remains essentially static. Their proposal serves to draw attention to the outcomes and characteristics of a so-called CSR process, rather than highlighting the dynamic, sensemaking-based CSR processes themselves. Furthermore, by mainly focusing on managerial and intra-organizational sensemaking processes, their model does not provide a full explication of the social and dialogue processes that underlie the interactive nature by which CSR unfolds in organizations.

To increase both the relevancy and the legitimacy of the proposed conceptualization then,

we need greater emphasis on the dynamic and multistakeholder nature of the processes by which CSR unfolds in organizations. We adhere to Nijhof and Jeurissen's (2006: 319) assumption that the CSR process primarily involves "creating and recreating an internally and externally shared frame of reference in relation to CSR objectives, activities and results." In particular, we assert that CSR is an (1) ongoing multipartite process (2) through which internal and external stakeholders of the organization interactively construct and share sense (3) through symbolic and emphatic dialogue and actions (4) about issues pertaining to the organizational activities (5) and that are interpreted in relation to the social good by one or several of the parties. With this definition, we insist on the multipartite dimension of sensemaking processes through which CSR unfolds in organization, which enables us to move beyond a manager-centric standpoint. Organizational sensemaking and sensegiving processes that characterize how CSR unfolds in organizations necessarily involve various internal and external stakeholder groups, including the company itself, that continuously react to one another and make different senses of their reality.

A DYNAMIC SENSEMAKING–SENSEGIVING PROCESSUAL MODEL OF CSR

We contend that CSR, because it is ongoing and interactive, involves four broad, multistakeholder, interdependent processes that typically—though not exclusively—characterize how it unfolds in organizations. We identify these concomitant processes as (1) a converging managerial sensemaking process, (2) a compounded managerial sensegiving process, (3) a diverging extra-managerial sensemaking process, and (4) a differentiated extra-managerial sensegiving process. They consist of distinct influences and outcomes, triggered by CSR-related ambiguous and uncertain stimuli and issues that continuously emerge from internal and external

environments. In the proposed model, the CSR managerial processes focus particularly on upper and middle managers, who must interpret the signals sent by the environment (Hegarty & Thianyi, 1999). The way they make sense of events then forms the basis for their organizational decision responses (Child, 1972; Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997); they also maintain, nurture, and advance the CSR commitments of the company (Quazi, 2003). Conversely, extra-managerial processes refer to external stakeholders, as well as other internal stakeholders of the company. Because they reflect how these diverse, extra-managerial stakeholders comprehend, translate, and convey societal expectations and issues to the organization, these processes should play a critical role in determining how companies come to recognize and integrate CSR issues.

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Managerial CSR Sensemaking Process

To make sense of the environment, managers must wade into the ocean of stimuli and events surrounding their organization (Daft & Weick, 1984) and identify key issues. Any CSR-related stimuli and issues then require interpretation to translate them into knowledge, shared understanding, and conceptual schemas among managers, before the organization can determine whether and how to respond to these issues in a strategically relevant way.

Yet managers inevitably perceive their environment uniquely and imperfectly, so the way they make sense of CSR-related stimuli and issues depends on various factors. We underline two sets of interconnected factors that likely orient the way managers, both independently and

communally, make sense of CSR-related issues and stimuli.

Individual factors. The individual characteristics of managers (e.g., demographics, professional and cultural backgrounds, affiliations) likely influence their discernment and interpretation of CSR-related issues (e.g., Deshpande, 1997; Van Maanen & Barley, 1984). For instance more risk-averse managers should be less inclined to think about enviropreneurial marketing strategies (Menon & Menon, 1997), while managers with more experience should demonstrate a superior facility to consider policies that will address stakeholders' needs (Thomas & Simerly, 1994). We also note that women tend to demonstrate a higher predisposition toward integrating CSR-related issues (Burton & Hegarty, 1999). Furthermore, ethical and CSR-related attitudes and predispositions vary across cultures (Trevino, Weaver, & Reynolds, 2006).

Yet personal subjective drivers, such as values, affect, and expectations, also likely impinge on how upper managers make sense of their environment (e.g., Crilly, Schneider, & Zollo, 2008; Sonenshein, 2007; Weaver & Agle, 2002). Managers' personal values influence their inclination to take an interest in specific CSR-related stimuli and issues (Hemingway & MacLagan, 2004); in particular, their dispositions toward self-transcendent values (i.e., universalism and benevolence) influence their propensity to notice of ethical issues (Crilly et al., 2008). When facing an issue with a moral dimension, managers' moral maturity or cognitive moral development (Kohlberg, 1984) orients their mental processes and therefore affects the way in which they notice and assimilate CSR-related information. Sonenshein (2007) also underscores that people's expectations influence how they perceive cues and construct meaning, which can lead managers to overlook an ethical issue, since their expectations at work often do not include ethical criteria.

Organizational factors. The sector of activity, identity, culture, and structure of a company shape to a large extent the interpretation of stimuli and issues adopted by its members (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Basically, scholars have suggested that a company's sector of activity, for example, influences managerial perceptions of and attitudes toward CSR issues (e.g., Bhambri & Sonnenfeld, 1988).

Also, managers' interpretation of and reaction to environmental stimuli and events also depends on how they perceive the organizational identity of their company, as that identity comes to provide a source of collectively constructed preconceptions (Weick, 1988). The organization's identity orientation—"the nature of assumed relations between an organization and its stakeholders" (Brickson, 2005: 577)—influences managerial perceptions and behaviors with respect to the organizational relationships with stakeholders outside the sphere of business interest. For example, companies that adopt a firm-centered orientation tend to be less CSR-oriented than companies that embrace a system-centered orientation or other-regarding orientation (Agle, Mitchell, & Sonnenfeld, 1999). Thus, organizational identity orientation can determine the nature of the CSR-related activities that companies undertake (Basu & Palazzo, 2008).

Organizational culture, or the pattern of basic assumptions that organizations use to cope with external adaptations and internal integration problems (Schein, 1990), represents for its part a framework for how people think, how work gets done, and how interactions proceed in the company. In this sense, organizational culture provides storehouses of information, knowledge, and know-how, which may support or detract from CSR understanding and efforts (Doppelt, 2003). Accordingly, when organizational cultures promote CSR awareness and support "ethical"

decision making, they foster the development of CSR (Lyon, 2004; Trevino & Nelson, 2007). Specifically, the stakeholder culture—“the beliefs, values, and practices that have evolved for solving stakeholder-related problems and otherwise managing relationships with stakeholders” (Jones, Felps, & Bigley, 2007: 142)—critically influences the managerial consciousness of and sensitivity toward CSR-related issues.

Finally, organizational structure might affect managers’ sensemaking processes, because it establishes hierarchical and functional configurations and determines which organizational groups interact with which stakeholders. In turn, structure influences whom managers meet and which stimuli and issues they are more likely to notice. Managers’ perceptions and awareness of CSR issues thus depend on their functional orientation and field of managerial knowledge (Maon, Lindgreen, & Swaen, 2008). Furthermore, managerial awareness of CSR-related events may be influenced by the level of cross-functional coordination within the organization (Sharma, Pablo, & Vredenburg, 1999).

Converging nature of managerial CSR sensemaking. Upper and middle managers make sense of CSR-related issues by using their individual and organizational criteria, which can generate multiple, diverse accounts (Balogun & Johnson, 2004, Mailis, 2005). However, convergence among managers helps organize and design organizational policies (Weick, 1979) and enables the organization to “interpret as a system” (Daft & Weick, 1984: 285). Such necessary convergence generally result from regular interactions between and among upper and middle managers; through formal and informal processes and shared meaning (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991), managers progressively develop a collective frame of reference that establishes the shared and homogeneous perceptions of organizational goals and performance (Cramer et al., 2004; Maon et

al., 2008). In the end, this converging managerial sensemaking process also affects the way managers give sense to CSR.

Managerial CSR Sensegiving Process

As “sensegivers,” managers promote certain images and understandings of CSR-related events to other internal and external stakeholders, while excluding or adapting other events. On the one hand, directly coupled with the managerial sensemaking process then, some managers may attempt to affect how other managers understand CSR-related issues. These CSR “champions” – i.e. people who informally emerge in an organization and actively promote an innovation (Archilladis, Jervis, & Robertson, 1971) - try to focus attention to certain CSR-related issues. In this ‘intra-managerial’ perspective, CSR sensegiving becomes a type of “issue-selling process” (Pater & Van Lierop, 2006) by which people with managerial responsibility “create variety in the pool of strategic ideas and initiatives within an organization” (Ashford, Rothbard, Piderit, & Dutton, 1998: 23). Through this issue-selling process, managers' concerns and perceptions become part of the organization's collective awareness (Ocasio, 1997).

Yet on the other hand, CSR initiatives and efforts, regardless of their nature and relevancy, are “generally intended to portray an image of a company as responsive to the needs of the society it depends on for survival” (Ellen et al., 2006). Management therefore tries to give sense to CSR-related issues and the proposed organizational responses by disseminating its own CSR vision to other internal and external stakeholders. Morsing and Schultz (2006) highlight three strategic options managers often adopt to convey the CSR messages an organization has constructed: stakeholder information, stakeholder response, and stakeholder involvement. The first strategy entails only a one-way sensegiving process, whereas the two latter involve both

sensegiving and sensemaking by managers. With the stakeholder information strategy, managers tell stories to stakeholders, without listening to them. The stakeholder response strategy instead is based on a two-way, asymmetric communication model, and the stakeholder involvement strategy uses a two-way, symmetric communication model. In the stakeholder response strategy, the company attempts to change public attitudes and behavior (Morsing & Schultz, 2006) but does not change itself; in the stakeholder involvement strategy, the company is inclined to evolve according to its interactions with stakeholders.

As we theorized for the managerial sensemaking process, both individual traits of managers and collective traits of the company are expected to influence how managers attempt to give sense to CSR-related stimuli and events, as well as the type of strategies they adopt to do so.

Individual factors. Individual characteristics and backgrounds affect people's level of social involvement (e.g., Burton & Hegarty, 1999), including managers' inclination to engage in CSR sensegiving. Personal beliefs and motivational drivers also impinge on managers' propensity to influence how others will make sense of CSR-related stimuli and issues. In particular, motivation to sell an issue appears related to managers' beliefs about whether their efforts may be successful and benefit their image and credibility (Dutton & Ashford, 1993). Conversely, if managers perceive that their selling efforts will fail or regard CSR-related concerns as obviously inappropriate in terms of current organizational goals or to other powerful organizational members, they might adapt their discourse or avoid engaging in sensegiving. If they were to undertake sensegiving and issue-selling efforts that might negatively affect the organization's image, these managers would indeed take the risk of being perceived as disloyal to the organization or incompetent, leading to diminished personal credibility (Ashford et al., 1998).

Organizational factors. The intended and construed images of the organization also influence the CSR managerial sensegiving process. The intended image of an organization reflects the mental associations that management desires stakeholders to hold about the organization (Brown, Dacin, Pratt, & Whetten, 2006). As such, it drives attempts by managers to position the organization in a certain way in stakeholders' minds and emphasize certain attributes that they hope stakeholders will associate with the organization (Whetten & Mackey, 2002). In contrast, the construed image of an organization pertains to the collective mental associations that organization members believe outsiders hold about the organization (Brown et al., 2006). Because managers must make strategic decisions and take actions to give sense to CSR-related issues, they first must figure out other stakeholders' interpretations of the issue to predict their reactions once an issue has caught public attention. Management often engages in CSR sensegiving when the intended and construed organizational images become too different. However, managers also may choose to avoid intentionally communicating a particular image to a particular group and thus “‘hide’ the company per se from one or more stakeholder groups” (Brown et al., 2006: 104). For example, a company with an existing but poorly performing environmental management system could decide to “hide” it temporarily from critical pressure groups and not engage in sensegiving initiatives with these groups for related issues.

The discursive orientation of the organization represents another decisive factor affecting the nature and the style of its managerial sensegiving process (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007). When it comes to CSR-related issues, Basu and Palazzo (2008) suggest that the dominant form of discourse organizations use to justify their actions itself constitutes an important dimension of the CSR managerial sensegiving process. On the basis of Ashforth and Gibbs's (1990) work, Basu

and Palazzo (2008) highlight legal, scientific, economic, and ethical modes of justification. Specifically, though the legal mode, managers present officially accepted arguments that support initiatives, to prevent disapproval. With a scientific justification, the organization relies on internal or external expertise to rationalize its behavior. When the emphasizing substantial and constructive impact of its actions on stakeholders, management uses the economic mode of justification. Finally, through the ethical mode of justification, management presents cosmopolitan or higher-order interests that support its actions. Accordingly, we assume that the mode of justification most prevalent in an organization's discourse influences the nature, target, and content of the managerial sensegiving process.

Compounded nature of CSR managerial sensegiving. Managerial sensegiving for CSR usually consists of an arrangement of fairly similar, although adapted sensegiving processes oriented toward various stakeholders, which together constitute a compounded CSR managerial sensegiving process. Even if their individual factors inevitably differentiate the sensegiving efforts of various managers, homogeneous and collective CSR managerial sensegiving often progressively emerges in an organization to articulate consistent, somewhat uniform, persuasive speeches and behaviors—even if some discrepancies can persist. In addition, while middle managers' persuasive attempts depend on upper management's sensegiving, upper management in turn is influenced by middle management's sensegiving, according to the middle managers' actions and issue-selling initiatives (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991).

When managers address messages to the company's environment though, they typically deal with a wide range of internal and external recipient groups. Accordingly, the sensegiving process and strategy adopted to influence other stakeholders' sensemaking processes ideally get

adapted to the intended and construed organizational images for each specific stakeholder groups. However, it still appears risky to convey thoroughly different meanings about the same CSR to different stakeholders. Rather, management tends to “color” its CSR sensegiving attempts, depending on the perceived expectations and features of the particular recipients. In this sense, framing effects that influence how an issue, problem, or topic gets presented for consideration (Druckman, 2001) offer a common means to influence stakeholder groups’ views an issue and its potential resolution (Mahon & Wartick, 2003).

Outcomes Associated with Managerial CSR Sensemaking and Sensegiving Processes

The interdependent, convergent, managerial CSR sensemaking and compounded, managerial sensegiving processes typify the CSR lineament of the organization and its social responsiveness posture, or the organization’s character in terms of its interactions with others and the level of responsibility it assumes in managing stakeholders’ issues and relationships. Clarkson (1995) distinguishes four social responsiveness postures: a reactive posture or denial of CSR issues; a defensive posture associated with making sense of and admitting the responsibilities of the organization and fighting against them; an accommodation posture in which the firm accepts its responsibility; and a proactive posture in which the company anticipates its future responsibility. As the company faces, makes sense of, and gives sense to CSR challenges, its responsive posture progressively evolves (Mirvis, 2000).

Managerial sensemaking–sensegiving processes and the associated social responsiveness posture are in turn reflected in the strategic purpose (i.e., compliance, license to operate, business case, value proposition, social change), implementation tactics (i.e., resources, structuring and coordination, transparency), and nature (i.e., type, scope, depth) of CSR commitments the

organization makes (Cramer et al., 2006; Mirvis & Googins, 2006).

Extra-Managerial CSR Sensemaking Process

Extra-managerial stakeholders, because of their unique and varied characteristics, tend to raise different issues that they consider appropriate and relevant for overall social good. In addition, because of the commonly ambiguous language that organizations use to describe their CSR, those various stakeholders must continuously interpret and reinterpret CSR-related issues and CSR initiatives proposed by the organization. Therefore, the way various stakeholders make sense of a CSR-related issue and the organizational response may differ substantially from the sense that managers make of and endeavor to give them.

By adopting this extra-managerial perspective on CSR sensemaking, we highlight that various stakeholders understand and interpret CSR-related stimuli and issues in their own way (Pater & Van Lierop, 2006; Schouten & Remmé, 2006). In turn, we note the importance of considering interconnected categorical and inferential influences, in an attempt to clarify how stakeholder groups variously make sense of CSR-related issues and associated CSR organizational initiatives.

Categorical factors. Baron (1995) proposes distinguishing stakeholders according to their business links with the organization. Thus, market stakeholders designate those groups and individuals within the business system that interact with the firm through some form of economic transaction (Cummings & Doh, 2000); nonmarket or socio-political stakeholders are those who relate to the firm on a non-economic basis. This simple categorization emphasizes that stakeholders' groups are basically characterized by their own objectives and expectations with

respect to company behavior (Orts & Strudler, 2002) and social responsibility (Waddock, Bodwell, & Graves, 2002). For instance, in contrast with many market stakeholders, nonmarket stakeholders regularly demonstrate higher interest in and awareness of CSR issues and typically assess company performance through indicators other than profit (Baron, 1995). More specifically, deeply involved pressure groups and socially responsible investment analysts often represent the most knowledgeable groups. By contrast, CSR awareness among consumers still appears as rather low (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004).

Inferential factors. Extra-managerial stakeholders typically make sense of CSR stimuli and companies' CSR commitments and messages depending on the motives that they attribute to the companies' CSR activities (i.e., altruism versus self-interest; Ellen et al., 2006; Sen et al., 2006). Stronger attributions to genuinely altruistic corporate concerns likely prompt more positive interpretations of CSR messages (Ellen et al., 2006; Sen et al., 2006). Stakeholders furthermore tend to attribute a company's 'responsible' behavior to instrumental reasons when a potential external cause co-occurs with the behavior, compared with when no such cause appears salient (Sjovall & Talk, 2004).

Corporate reputation, which equals the set of corporate associations that stakeholders believe are central, enduring, and distinctive to the company (Brown et al., 2006), constitutes another critical element that affects how stakeholders make sense of a company's CSR initiatives. A preexisting CSR reputation colors stakeholders' interpretations of emerging CSR-related issues and organizational responses (Zagenczyk, 2004). For example, consumers likely hold a company less responsible for a CSR-related crisis if it already possesses a strong CSR reputation (Klein & Dawar, 2004). The critical role of corporate reputation is accentuated because various

stakeholders share and discuss this information (Fombrun, 1996), which means that stakeholders' sensemaking processes depend on the intentions and influences of potentially very wide groups. For many stakeholders who lack direct experience with the company, "when an issue arises, they will rely on others to supply information about the reputation of the firm and the industry" (Mahon, 2002: 431). The media in particular plays a central role in determining how stakeholders make sense of organizational realities (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994); reputation among employees also appears to have a specific and direct impact on reputation among customers and communities (Carmeli, 2005).

Diverging nature of CSR extra-managerial sensemaking. Although stakeholder groups might develop a communal sensemaking process for particular CSR-related issues or organizational initiatives, categorical and inferential factors of influence often lead to situations in which extra-managerial CSR sensemaking entails multiple accounts of the CSR-related events and stimuli. The diverse types of stakeholders can substantially vary in their interpretations of the same CSR issues and the organizational responses (Maon, Swaen, & Lindgreen, 2009). Because the construction of sense by these diverse stakeholders groups tends to be divergent, the organizational reality with respect to CSR concerns emerges as multiple and fragmented.

Extra-Managerial CSR Sensegiving Process.

In line with Froomean's (1999) typology of stakeholders' influence strategies and noting that stakeholders' CSR sensemaking accounts often depart from those conveyed by managers, we posit that extra-managerial stakeholders may engage in direct and or indirect efforts to influence or manage CSR sensemaking for the company. On the one hand, stakeholders may orient their

CSR-related messages and behaviors directly toward managers (e.g., an investor critically questions company management about a CSR issue, without making it public). On the other hand, stakeholders may attempt to influence managerial sensemaking indirectly by addressing their messages and meaning-loaded behaviors to other parties in the stakeholders' network (e.g., a consumer association organizes a letter-writing campaign directed at the company). Furthermore, because stakeholder sensegiving activities involve intense flows of information, both within the stakeholder group and among various stakeholder groups (Maitlis, 2005), extra-managerial stakeholder groups likely influence other stakeholder groups' CSR sensemaking processes. That is, when stakeholders engage in CSR sensemaking, the occurrence, nature, and target of associated stakeholders' potential sensegiving efforts should depend on the category of stakeholders involved, as well as the inferences that stakeholders make about the necessity, impact, and reactions associated with their attempts.

Categorical factors. Freeman (1984) and Clarkson (1995) both distinguish between primary stakeholders, who have direct and well-established legal claims on company resources and whose continued participation is absolutely necessary for business survival, and secondary stakeholders, who are not essential for the company's survival but "have the capacity to mobilize public opinion in favor of, or in opposition to, a corporation's performance" (Clarkson, 1995: 106). This categorization suggests how different stakeholder groups might influence managers' and other stakeholders' CSR sensemaking. Groups with clear, widely recognized, legitimate claims on the company should be more prone to engage in direct influence strategies; groups indirectly engaged with the company and not essential for its survival use more indirect approaches (Frooman, 1999).

Furthermore, the influence approaches they adopt likely are bounded by the repertoire of

actions (Carmin & Balser, 2002) and discursive abilities (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007) that stakeholders have previously developed. This repertoire mostly depends on the nature of interactions that the various stakeholder groups have developed with the companies' managers and other groups.

Finally, the political ideology, core values, and collective beliefs that mark the various stakeholders groups affect the type of CSR issues they choose to address (den Hond & de Bakker, 2007). For instance, trade unions logically are more inclined to engage in intense sensegiving processes for issues linked to living wages and freedom of association than those related to climate change concerns.

Inferential factors. Stakeholder groups make inferences about the need to take actions to influence a company and thus protect or support their particular stake-defined interest (Frooman, 1999; Savage, Nix, Whitehead, & Blair, 1991), as well as about the expected success of their actions. The results of these inferences prevailingly stimulate (or not) stakeholders to engage in extra-managerial sensegiving (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003). However, stake-defined interest is not the only motivation for stakeholder groups to engage in influence attempts. Stakeholders might choose to undertake sensegiving efforts even if they expect the success of their efforts, as measured by a change in the target's sensemaking or behavior, to be limited (Rowley & Moldoveanu, 2003). For example, the intent to affirm an identity or reinforce its own position in a stakeholder network (de Bakker & Den Hond, 2008) can lead a stakeholder group to engage in intense sensegiving processes directed at both managers and other stakeholders. Similarly, stakeholder groups might engage in forceful sensegiving processes to form coalitions based on CSR issues, which may "have more influence than a stakeholder alone" (Vos, 2003: 142). These

situations further emphasize the political dimension of extra-managerial sensegiving efforts.

Differentiated nature of CSR extra-managerial sensegiving. Because of their diverse natures, interests, and political intentions, various extra-managerial stakeholder groups are characterized by distinctive CSR sensegiving processes. Each stakeholder group, sometimes in coalition with others, develops distinctive strategies to influence managers' and other stakeholders' sensemaking processes. In particular, the direct and indirect CSR sensegiving efforts aimed at the company's managers might differ according to the level of disagreement between the stakeholder group's and the management's view of the world, the levels of legitimacy and political activism adopted by the stakeholder group (see Grunig, 1992), and the level of resources the stakeholder group possesses (Heath, 1997). As a result, managers may face multiple, varicolored, tangible, and symbolic messages, all aimed at altering their interpretation and behavior toward CSR-related issues.

Outcomes Associated with Extra-Managerial Sensemaking and Sensegiving Processes

Through their extra-managerial CSR sensemaking and sensegiving efforts, stakeholders interpret and react to the CSR messages that the company's management purposefully has directed toward them, as well as to the CSR stimuli that emerge in the broader environment. Thus, stakeholders construct and share meanings of and perceptions about CSR issues, creating a link between companies' behaviors and society's expectations. Extra-managerial CSR sensemaking and sensegiving processes in turn impinge on managers' perceptions of the organizational environment and generate greater awareness of CSR issues and their particular relevance for the organization. In this sense, extra-managerial CSR sensemaking and sensegiving processes

actually integrate stakeholders into, or exclude them from, important organizational processes, which have profound consequences on corporate decision making (Balogun & Johnson, 2004). As such, extra-managerial CSR sensemaking and sensegiving processes play key roles in advancing companies in their CSR.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Understanding the meaning of CSR for an organization is a time-consuming and involved process, yet many managers use CSR language, even as its significance remains abstract and uncertain. But no management team alone can fully comprehend the complex systems that characterize organizational activities and their impact. Managers instead must engage with their companies' stakeholders in processes aimed at discovering the important issues they face and making sense of their actions, all of which could have critical impacts on the social good.

We propose a model that combines four interconnected interpretive and influence processes, centering on managerial and extra-managerial stakeholders: convergent managerial sensemaking, compounded managerial sensegiving, fragmented extra-managerial sensemaking, and differentiated extra-managerial sensegiving. These distinct sensemaking and sensegiving patterns simultaneously shape the process of social construction, by which internal and external stakeholder groups attempt to interpret, explain, act, and react to CSR-related stimuli and issues.

This conceptual paper therefore contributes to a better understanding of the CSR concept and its dynamic translation into managerial understanding and actions. First, we expand existing CSR conceptualizations by integrating interpretive, interactive, and dynamic perspectives of organizational sensemaking and sensegiving processes. Our comprehensive process model also

provides important insights into how managers and stakeholders may privately view the meaning of CSR issues, prior to an influence attempt, and how they publicly portray those issues during influence attempts. Second, this research emphasizes the role played by various social actors in a company's environment during the process by which CSR unfolds. Specifically, we note how extra-managerial stakeholders make sense of and give sense to CSR issues and actions. They mainly make sense of CSR issues according to the conditions they face and the worldviews they adopt, and they give sense to CSR issues in accordance with their distinct natures and objectives. Our proposed multipartite model stresses the importance of establishing formal and informal room for exchanges and dialogue between managerial and extra-managerial stakeholders, which enables them to confront their different understandings and worldviews constructively and thus develop progressive, convergent conceptions of the company's mission and responsibilities with respect to CSR issues. By engaging in willful interactions through sensemaking and sensegiving processes, managers and stakeholders can steadily make sense of the challenges ahead, as well as of one another's terms of reference and opinions. As interpretive processes and influence attempts persist, managerial interpretations can evolve (Isabella, 1990), while the CSR character of the company progressively emerges and establishes links between society's aspirations and the company's developments. If managers of the company instead maintain their narrow vision of the organizational environment and essentially limit themselves to interactions with other managers, they risk alienating the entire company from the rest of society, "resulting in reduced reputation, increased costs and decreasing shareholder value through erosion of its license to operate" (Hill, 2001: 32).

Of course, our conceptual inquiry is not exempt from limitations. The complexity of organizational entities and organizational phenomena guarantees that rigorous postulations,

models, and theories cannot represent the entire range of real-life practices and situations, and thus, some of our theoretical choices require further discussion, together with empirical support. Nonetheless, we attempt to provide an insightful, resourceful analysis of a contemporary organizational phenomenon by articulating key theories in a multidisciplinary perspective and comprehensively construct a process and multipartite conceptualization of socially responsible behaviors by contemporary business organizations.

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FIGURE 1: A sensemaking–sensegiving model of CSR development in business organizations

