

Are Schwartz & Carroll's 5 Business & Society Frameworks Still Dominant?

Working Paper

John G. Cullen

Maynooth University School of Business

12 September 2017

Abstract

In 2008, *Business & Society* published Schwartz and Carroll's description of five central frameworks that had come to dominate the field of Business & Society. Although frequently cited, there has been no empirical analysis or verification of these frameworks or inter-relationships between them. This research note aims to address this by providing bibliometric data on peer-reviewed research outputs conducted on these frameworks since this article first appeared. 'Corporate Social Responsibility' and 'Stakeholder Management Theory' are clearly the most researched frameworks, and 'Sustainability' has demonstrated significant growth over the ten years since the article was first published. 'Business Ethics' and (to a greater extent) 'Corporate Citizenship' appear to have grown less as research fields, but there may be some evidence of areas of 'cross-over' between fields. The limitations of this research are discussed alongside avenues and opportunities for developing deeper understanding of these business & society frameworks.

Introduction

The existence of numerous theories and practices within the field of Business & Society risks confusing managers, employees and researchers about the nature of the various approaches within the field. Fassin et al (2011) discuss how the 'intermingled use of various CSR and business ethics-related concepts in numerous academic articles, in corporate communication and in the media has led to a certain confusion between those concepts' (p. 426), and cite research articles (mainly published between 2000 and 2005) which complain of different disciplines employing the same concept in different ways. The results of this has been conceptual unclarity. Adding to this problem, there are over one hundred definitions each for terms such as 'CSR', 'Business Ethics' and 'Sustainability' (van Marrewijk 2003, Egels 2005, Marshall and Toffel 2005), which has led to what Marshall & Toffel (2005) refer to as 'definitional chaos' (p. 673). There is a clear danger from the development of this imbroglio that if academics cannot be clear about that nature of the Business & Society field at a theoretical level, that it may be difficult for managers or employees to implement ethical or responsible initiatives in organisational practice. Fassin et al (2011) write

'If, as has been indicated above, academic researchers are not able to clearly distinguish between CSR and related concepts, then how can one expect the business community to understand the meanings and differential characteristics of these concepts? This question is all the more pertinent since these notions, once they are conveyed by non-specialists such as general business authors and journalists, lead to greater vagueness, ambiguity and confusion' (p. 428).

Schwartz & Carroll (2008) assisted in the provision of a solution to the problem of multiple approaches and definitions in the business & society field by in outlining five complementary frameworks which had become prominent at that time. These frameworks

are: corporate social responsibility (CSR); business ethics; stakeholder management; sustainability, and; corporate citizenship. Schwartz & Carroll proposed that the three core concepts of value, balance, and accountability could be used to integrate the five frameworks. Although this article has been frequently cited in the business & society literature, the frameworks have not been empirically validated or re-visited since first published. Schwartz & Carroll also point out that their five frameworks ‘appear’ to have become prominent and the article does not discuss a method or empirical base by which the five frameworks were developed. Since the article was published there have been a number of new technological developments (such as the growing impact of social media and the use data analytics and Artificial Intelligence in business decision making), socio-economic events (the global financial crisis and its aftermath, the refugee crisis and the increasing influence of popular nationalism and the far right in developed nations) and international initiatives (such as the co-ordination of a binding multi-nation agreement on addressing the accelerating pace of climate change and the establishment of the UN’s Global Compact [Gladkikh et al., 2013] and associated initiatives such as the Globally Responsible Leadership Initiative, the Principles for Responsible Investment and the Principles for Responsible Management Education (Haertle & Miura, 2014). These initiatives were established in the middle of the first decade of the 2000s, so their impact on issues relating to business & society were not ‘live’ when Schwartz & Carroll proposed their five business and society frameworks in 2008. As business and society frameworks such as CSR are constantly evolving (O’Riordan and Fairbrass 2014) it is important to review developments regularly in order to ensure that the organisation of literature in the field is up-to-date.

In summary there is an opportunity to revisit the five frameworks proposed by Schwartz and Carroll to ascertain if the five proposed frameworks, and their inter-relationships, have changed since the article was published in 2008 have impacted on the

broader field of business and society. There is also an opportunity to investigate if new Business & Society frameworks have evolved recently.

This research note proceeds as follows. Firstly, Schwartz and Carroll's (2008) article is outlined in relation to the claims made about each of the five frameworks which it discusses. Then the bibliometric analysis used to verifying these frameworks is outlined. Results are reported and key findings and avenues for future research are discussed.

Schwartz & Carroll's (2008) Dominant Frameworks

In response to the existence of competing frameworks in the field of Business & Society, Schwartz & Carroll noted that 'the primary contenders appear to include (a) corporate social responsibility (CSR), (b) business ethics (BE), (c) stakeholder management (SM), (d) sustainability (SUS), and (e) corporate citizenship (CC)' (p. 148). They pointed out that difficulties persisted in understanding what these frameworks meant and suggested that the 'result has been some measure of confusion in the business and society field, which threatens to hinder the field's theoretical development' (p. 149). In order to overcome this confusion, Schwartz and Carroll suggest a framework which integrates three of the shared components of these interlocking frameworks. They summarise the main components of, and the tensions found within, each framework in their paper, but for in the interests of brevity, these are summarised below.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is the most established framework both in research and in terms of its acceptance in the business community, but an exact definition remains elusive due to a plethora of different theoretical foundations for the concept. CSR's focus on Corporate Social Performance (CSP) belies an enduring emphasis on outcomes.

Carroll and Schwartz post that the CSR concept stands out by the emphasis on the social component of the framework.

Business Ethics (BE) developed as an academic field in the 1970s, became institutionalised in the 1980s, and grew in prominence as a result of the corporate scandals of the early 2000s. Primarily driven by the application of moral philosophy to the business field it is concerned with the ethics of the capitalist system, business organisations and (especially) the individual morality of individuals who work and manage in corporations. It has been perceived as a normative framework which applies ethical theories such as utilitarianism, deontological theories, moral rights, justice and virtue ethics to practical business decisions and activities to ascertain if moral standards have been violated or upheld.

Stakeholder Management (SM) grew rapidly as a dominant framework following the publication of Freeman's *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach* in 1984 (2010). Primarily concerned with the organisations relationship with various stakeholders and the impact which these have on relationships, SM debates focused on stakeholder identification and prioritization.

Corporate (or Business) Sustainability (SUS) grew in prominence following the publication of *Our Common Future* by the Brundtland Commission (1987). Influenced by the concept of sustainable development, SUS developed from its initial focus on sustaining the natural environment to sustaining cultures and communities as part of a holistic approach with emphasises these areas inter-relationship with economic sustainability.

Corporate Citizenship (CC) was 'the newest kid on the business and society block' in 2008 but appeared to grow rapidly in popularity with both corporate and academic communities. Like the other frameworks, CC has been variously defined but it is primarily

concerned with the organisation developing a responsible awareness of itself as having responsibilities to global social, political and economic spheres, just a private citizens do.

The literature within all of these frameworks have been reviewed extensively since the publication of Schwartz and Carroll's paper in 2008. See, for example: Duncan (2008); Laplume et al (2008); Carroll and Shabana (2010); Chabowski (2011); Aguinis and Glavas (2012); Wang et al (2016); Short et al (2016), Cullen (Forthcoming), etc. This research note does not attempt to add to these reviews. Rather, it is concerned with finding an answer to the question: Do these five frameworks remain the most prominent business & society constructs in the academic, peer reviewed literature?

Method

Like many scholarly fields, bibliometric research has been used to periodically map or identify the evolution of subfields or key concerns within the field of business and society (de Bakker and den Hond 2005, de Bakker *et al.* 2006, Beets *et al.* 2013). The field of bibliometric research and co-word analysis has grown in scope and complexity in recent years (de Bellis 2009, Cronin and Sugimoto 2014), but as this research attempted to answer specific questions about the inter-relationship between 5 important organising concepts it was possible to conduct more straightforward data collection and analysis. It is hoped that the questions arising from this data collection will result in the development of a research agenda about the evolving nature of these frameworks.

To answer the question: 'Do these five frameworks remain the most prominent business & society constructs in the academic, peer reviewed literature?' title and topic searches on each field was conducted on the Web of Science / Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) on July 25th, 26th and 27th 2017. The SSCI has grown to be one of the most searched

and influential research databases which is frequently used in mapping the research literature in fields related to business and management research (Oswick 2009, Wang *et al.* 2012, Cullen 2016). Topic searches are employed as they have proven to be 'the most comprehensive field for capturing all mentions of the search term in the title, abstract and keyword of the searched peer-reviewed articles' in the SSCI' (Cullen, 2016 p. 293). However, it is also important to report on the result of a title search as inclusion of a search string in the title of research article can demonstrate the centrality of the keyword to the paper. The wildcard operator (*) was added to the 'stakeholder*' and 'corporate citizen*' search strings to capture as many variations of these fields as possible. For example 'stakeholder*' might capture 'stakeholders' and 'stakeholder management'; 'corporate citizen*' might capture 'corporate citizens' and 'corporate citizenship', etc. Finally, the search terms 'stakeholder*' and 'sustainability' have a currency beyond the fields of business and management studies. With this in mind there are more returns for these than are specifically relevant to the field of business & society. For example a topic search on 'sustainability' conducted on 28th June 2017 returned 23879 articles. The 'top 25' Web of Science ® categories which these appeared are outlined in Table 1. It is important to note that articles can be assigned to more than one Web of Science ™ category.

Table 1: Web of Science Categories for Article Results from ‘Sustainability’ Topic Search

Web of Science Category	Number of records	Percent of 23879
ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES	6281	26.30%
ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES	5189	21.73%
GREEN SUSTAINABLE SCIENCE TECHNOLOGY	3404	14.26%
ECONOMICS	2439	10.21%
MANAGEMENT	1957	8.20%
BUSINESS	1729	7.24%
GEOGRAPHY	1352	5.66%
ECOLOGY	1337	5.60%
PLANNING DEVELOPMENT	1329	5.57%
PUBLIC ENVIRONMENTAL OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH	1280	5.36%
ENGINEERING ENVIRONMENTAL	1240	5.19%
EDUCATION EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH	968	4.05%
URBAN STUDIES	890	3.73%
ENERGY FUELS	806	3.38%
HEALTH POLICY SERVICES	627	2.63%
HOSPITALITY LEISURE SPORT TOURISM	613	2.57%
HEALTH CARE SCIENCES SERVICES	581	2.43%
SOCIOLOGY	581	2.43%
ETHICS	514	2.15%
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS	487	2.04%
TRANSPORTATION	475	1.99%
SOCIAL SCIENCES INTERDISCIPLINARY	468	1.96%
OPERATIONS RESEARCH MANAGEMENT SCIENCE	444	1.86%
WATER RESOURCES	420	1.76%
POLITICAL SCIENCE	400	1.68%

From this, it can be seen that the ‘environmental studies’, ‘environmental sciences’ and ‘green sustainable science technology’ account for 62.29% of the peer reviewed research publications (2008 – 2017) found from a topic search using the term ‘sustainability’, compared with 15.44% of publications which are related to the fields of business & management. Similarly, a topic search using the term ‘stakeholder*’ returned 25558 articles and 21.22% of these related to the Web of Science categories of ‘Business’ and ‘Management’ (see Table 2).

Table 2: Web of Science Categories for Article Results from ‘Stakeholder*’ Topic Search

Web of Science Category	Number of records	Percent of 25558
ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES	3639	14.24%
MANAGEMENT	2727	10.67%
PUBLIC ENVIRONMENTAL OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH	2717	10.63%
BUSINESS	2611	10.22%
ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES	2568	10.05%
HEALTH CARE SCIENCES SERVICES	1548	6.06%
HEALTH POLICY SERVICES	1501	5.87%
EDUCATION EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH	1167	4.57%
ECONOMICS	1127	4.41%
ETHICS	1119	4.38%
PLANNING DEVELOPMENT	988	3.87%
GREEN SUSTAINABLE SCIENCE TECHNOLOGY	970	3.80%
ECOLOGY	869	3.40%
GEOGRAPHY	788	3.08%
SOCIAL SCIENCES INTERDISCIPLINARY	718	2.81%
HOSPITALITY LEISURE SPORT TOURISM	706	2.76%
PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION	702	2.75%
INFORMATION SCIENCE LIBRARY SCIENCE	661	2.59%
NURSING	604	2.36%
WATER RESOURCES	569	2.23%

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS	567	2.22%
ENGINEERING ENVIRONMENTAL	552	2.16%
SOCIOLOGY	511	2.00%
URBAN STUDIES	495	1.94%
COMMUNICATION	484	1.89%

The largest business-related Web of Science categories returned for the ‘sustainability’ topic search were: Management (1957); Business (1729), Operations Research Management Science (444) and; Business Finance (309) and these are included in the co-word analysis that follows. When cross-classification of categories is taken into account, 3574 articles were found using the ‘sustainability’ search term. Similarly the largest Web of Science™ categories returned for the ‘stakeholder*’ topic search were Management (2727); Business (2611); Operations Research Management Science (437), and; Business Finance (405) and these comprised the fields included in the analysis relating to stakeholders. As with the case of sustainability, when cross-categorisations are taken into account, 5041 records were returned for this topic search. (see Table 3).

Results & Discussion

Topic & Title Search Results

When these considerations are taken into account the results were returned for title and topic searches on the SSCI for all of Carroll & Schwartz's five dominant frameworks on July 25th 2017 are reported in Table 3.

Table 3: Title & Topic Search Results for Schwartz and Carroll's 5 Frameworks.

Framework	Title Search Results	Topic Search Results
Corporate Social Responsibility	1713	5720
Stakeholder* [Business related fields only]	872	5041
Sustainability [Business related fields only]	1164	3574
Business Ethics	323	2636
Corporate Citizen*	91	819

From this it can be seen that 'corporate social responsibility' appears to retain the position of being the most dominant framework in the field of business society. Although there are more *topic* results for the 'stakeholder*' search, there are more *titles* returned for 'sustainability'. Business ethics and corporate citizenship are the least dominant of the five frameworks, but citations and publications in all five fields have grown over the timespan of the research (2008 – July 2017).

When the top ranked journals for each title and topic search field there is significant evidence that researchers chose to publish their research in a range of different journals which might indicate a large amount of cross-over between fields. Perhaps of greater interest would

be research on the indexed subject keyword of each field to ascertain the exact nature and extent of this cross-over.

The key findings of this paper are: CSR, Stakeholder theory and Sustainability remain the three largest business and society frameworks researched in the peer-reviewed research literature. Although the field of Corporate Citizenship has not grown to the same extent as the other frameworks, the rise of the 'alt-right' and corporate engagement with national taxation systems perhaps demonstrate a need for revitalizing the field of Corporate Citizenship as it is a field that requires more investigation in the context of changing global forces.

As this is a short research paper, there are many limitations to it. For example, it only studies peer-reviewed research published in the English language. It also studies scholarship, and not actual corporate practice. Avenues for future research arising from the paper might include an investigation of the relationship between author-indexed keywords in order to ascertain if there is evidence for the emergence and growth of new frameworks.

References

- Aguinis, H. and Glavas, A. (2012) 'What We Know and Don't Know About Corporate Social Responsibility: A Review and Research Agenda', *Journal of Management*, 38(4), 932-968.
- Beets, S. D., Lewis, B. R. and Brower, H. H. (2013) 'The Quality of Business Ethics Journals: An Assessment Based on Application', *Business & Society*, 55(2), 188-213.
- Carroll, A. B. and Shabana, K. M. (2010) 'The Business Case for Corporate Social Responsibility: A Review of Concepts, Research and Practice', *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 12(1), 85-105.
- Chabowski, B., Mena, J. and Gonzalez-Padron, T. (2011) 'The structure of sustainability research in marketing, 1958-2008: a basis for future research opportunities', *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 39(1), 55-70.
- Cronin, B. and Sugimoto, C. R. e. (2014) *Beyond bibliometrics : harnessing multidimensional indicators of scholarly impact*, Cambridge MA: The MIT Press.
- Cullen, J. G. (2016) 'Nursing management, religion and spirituality: a bibliometric review, a research agenda and implications for practice', *Journal of Nursing Management*, 24(3), 291-299.
- Cullen, J. G. (Forthcoming) 'Educating business students about Sustainability: A bibliometric review of current trends and research needs', *Journal of Business Ethics*, Forthcoming.
- de Bakker, F. G. A., Groenewegen, P. and den Hond, F. (2006) 'A Research Note on the Use of Bibliometrics to Review the Corporate Social Responsibility and Corporate Social Performance Literature', *Business & Society*, 45(1), 7-19.
- de Bakker, F. G. A. G., Peter and den Hond, F. (2005) 'A Bibliometric Analysis of 30 Years of Research and Theory on Corporate Social Responsibility and Corporate Social Performance', *Business & Society*, 44(3), 283-317.
- de Bellis, N. (2009) *Bibliometrics and Citation Analysis: From the Science Citation Index to Cybermetrics*, Plymouth: Scarecrow Press
- Development, W. C. o. E. (1987) *Our common future*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Duncan, K. (2008) 'Developing corporate environment and health strategy: review of existing corporate citizenship (CC) models', *Environmental Toxicology Ii*, 110, 35-44.

- Egels, N. (2005) *Sorting out the Mess, A Review of Definitions of Ethical Issues in Business* Göteborg Göteborg University.
- Fassin, Y., Van Rossem, A. and Buelens, M. (2011) 'Small-Business Owner-Managers' Perceptions of Business Ethics and CSR-Related Concepts', *Journal of Business Ethics*, 98(3), 425-453.
- Freeman, R. E. (2010) *Strategic management : a stakeholder approach*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Laplume, A. O., Sonpar, K. and Litz, R. A. (2008) 'Stakeholder Theory: Reviewing a Theory That Moves Us', *Journal of Management*, 34(6), 1152-1189.
- Marshall, J. D. and Toffel, M. W. (2005) 'Framing the Elusive Concept of Sustainability: A Sustainability Hierarchy', *Environmental Science & Technology*, 39(3), 673-682.
- O'Riordan, L. and Fairbrass, J. (2014) 'Managing CSR Stakeholder Engagement: A New Conceptual Framework', *Journal of Business Ethics*, 125(1), 121-145.
- Oswick, C. (2009) '**Burgeoning workplace spirituality? A textual analysis of momentum and directions.**', *Journal of Management, Spirituality and Religion*, 6(1), 15-25.
- Schwartz, M. S. and Carroll, A. B. (2008) 'Integrating and Unifying Competing and Complementary Frameworks The Search for a Common Core in the Business and Society Field', *Business & Society*, 47(2), 148-186.
- Short, J. C., McKenny, A. F., Ketchen, D. J., Snow, C. C. and Hult, G. T. M. (2016) 'An Empirical Examination of Firm, Industry, and Temporal Effects on Corporate Social Performance', *Business & Society*, 55(8), 1122-1156.
- van Marrewijk, M. (2003) 'Concepts and Definitions of CSR and Corporate Sustainability: Between Agency and Communion', *Journal of Business Ethics*, 44(2/3), 95-105.
- Wang, G. G., Gilley, J. W. and Sun, J. Y. (2012) 'The "science of HRD research": Reshaping HRD research through scientometrics', *Human Resource Development Review*, 11(4), 500-520.
- Wang, Q., Dou, J. S. and Jia, S. H. (2016) 'A Meta-Analytic Review of Corporate Social Responsibility and Corporate Financial Performance: The Moderating Effect of Contextual Factors', *Business & Society*, 55(8), 1083-1121.

