

ORGANIZING RESEARCH IN CORPORATE SOCIAL PERFORMANCE:

THE CSP SYSTEM AS CORE PARADIGM

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The field of business environment studies has never had a single, accepted, systematic, integrating logic to organize thinking about theory and practice. This paper introduces the concepts of a "sorting" or "classification logic" and of a "theory logic." After noting some persistent problems in the nature of research in business and society, the paper reviews major works that identify "corporate social performance" as the most appropriate focus for the field. Building on the recent work of Donna Wood, the paper then proposes a true systems model as a sorting logic able to systematically subsume all of the previous work. The systems model is found both to include all the components of previous models and to suggest additional features.

There are few things as perennial in the environment of business as issues and incidents that raise questions of corporate social performance. It is hardly remarkable that business organizations can produce important and varied social impacts, and that such organizations play critical roles both in political and economic settings in market economies (see, e.g., Lindblom 1977). What is perhaps more significant to students of corporate social behavior is the almost regular production of behaviors whose social impacts are perceived as dysfunctional or problematic, often both to society and to the firm involved.

Given the frequency and importance of such societally unapproved phenomena, our expectation would be that management theory would have long ago developed both workable explanatory theory of the phenomena as well as developed, routinized management practice that followed from the theory. Yet, despite the existence of an entire division of the Academy of Management and of significant scholarly attention elsewhere in the social sciences, we cannot yet point to a single, accepted, systematic, integrating logic to organize our thinking about theory and practice in this area.

Indeed, there are a host of models, frameworks, and bits of theory or explanation or just arguments that purport to offer conceptual guidance to part or all of the field (for a review see Wood 1991a,c).¹ With some exceptions, few such approaches even bother to try to integrate