

CALL FOR PAPERS

***THE ROLE OF NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS (NGOs) IN THE
BUSINESS – GOVERNMENT – SOCIETY INTERFACE***

Business & Society
Special Issue

Guest Editors

Nicolas M. Dahan, Long Island University – CW Post
Jonathan P. Doh, Villanova University
Hildy Teegen, University of South Carolina

The Role of Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs) in the Business-Government-Society Interface

Over the past several decades, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have grown in number, size and stature, and have become important actors influencing the conduct of business, including business-government interactions and the broader role of business in society. NGOs, which have been defined broadly as non-state, non-firm actors, may include environmental groups, business associations, labor unions, human rights organizations, consumer groups, church and religious groups, academic institutions, think tanks, trade and industry associations, grassroots not-for-profit organizations, and many others. There is a rich and established record of business research that addresses the interactions between companies and other institutional and societal actors—chief among them, governments. Theoretical research streams such as stakeholder theory implicitly incorporate NGOs as relevant stakeholders. Nevertheless, there is very little research that explicitly examines the growing impact of NGOs on the business – government - society interface.

The events surrounding the effort to launch a new round of multilateral trade negotiations at Seattle in December of 1999, the protests at the World Bank meetings in the Spring of 2000, and the ongoing demonstrations by nongovernmental organizations at the meetings of the World Economic Forum and elsewhere, underscore the increasing activism and visibility of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). NGOs have emerged as important stakeholders in discussions over the terms and conditions under which business, government, and multilateral institutions manage the process of globalization, one of the most vexing issues facing public policy-makers, corporate executives, and broader societal interests around the world. At the same time, NGOs affect business by undertaking research, organizing boycotts, and often highlighting the shortcomings of multinational corporations in terms of social, ethical, and environmental responsibility. Yet these impressions are only the most public, and often the most negative images of NGO activism.

NGOs increasingly work directly and indirectly with companies and governments to influence corporate behavior, particularly where that behavior has a tangible social or environmental impact. Indeed, some corporations have developed competitive advantages by partnering with NGOs, improving their public perception and reputation, and in some cases, actual performance as a result.

Research on the role, operation, and strategies of NGOs in the international relations and nonprofit management fields has a rich and extensive record (cf. Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff, 2002; Florini, 2003; Fox and Brown, 1998; Hulme and Edwards, 1997; Lindenberg and Bryant, 2002; Salamon, 1987). In addition, there are several nascent efforts that have begun in management research (Dahan, Doh & Guay, 2006; Doh & Teegen, 2003; Rondinelli & London, 2003; Schepers, 2006; Teegen, Doh & Vachani, 2004; Yaziji, 2005). These include exploration of the broader role of NGOs in the process of global management and policy (Doh & Teegen, 2003; Teegen, Doh, & Vachani, 2004) and practitioner-oriented literature that provides guidance regarding corporate-NGO interactions, especially cooperative or collaborative partnerships (Hess, Rogovsky, & Dunfee, 2002; Pearce & Doh, 2005; Rondinelli & London, 2003; Yaziji, 2005). To date, however, there have been few systematic efforts within the business management domain to fully explore the constructs and contexts relevant in understanding the role of

NGOs in business, government and political relations, and in society more broadly. Nor has there been much conversation on this topic between business disciplines and other social sciences, such as political science, sociology, or economics. The potential for cross-fertilization between fields is promising, yet largely unexplored.

For this Special Forum, we welcome theoretical, empirical and review/integration contributions that focus on the roles of NGOs in the business-government-society interface.

General Themes

Among the general themes that could be addressed in this colloquium and special issue are efforts to:

- Evaluate the relevance of existing models, theories, and frameworks of business and management in light of the growing relevance and/or influence of NGOs in business, government and society.
- Isolate the impact of NGOs on business, and investigate the potential relevance of NGOs as moderators or mediators in the business-government relations bargaining framework and as important actors in influencing the political strategies of corporations
- Discuss the relevance of NGOs for established theoretical perspectives in business, government, and society, notably theories of corporate social responsibility and performance, and stakeholder and stewardship theories
- Examine situations and contexts in which NGOs have had or will have a disproportionate impact on business, government, and society and develop hypotheses regarding how and when NGO impacts will be most pronounced
- Investigate and compare how institutional contexts in different regions and countries affect the role of NGOs in business, government, and society
- Explore and describe the approaches, strategies, and techniques used by NGOs in society-- especially those related to their interactions with companies and governments and as mediators or moderators of the business-government interface
- Explore and describe the approaches, strategies, and techniques used by corporations in their interactions with NGOs, especially those in which NGOs may replace or supplant the traditional role of governments
- Describe how national and inter-governmental bodies and businesses are responding to the emergence of NGO influence, and assess cases demonstrating the material effects of NGOs on business, government and society.
- Propose avenues for further theoretical, empirical, and practitioner research that focuses on how NGOs may alter the nature and outcomes of businesses' interactions with governments and broader societies.

Possible Topics

Specific topics that could be explored as part of this forum are:

- How has the growing importance of NGOs affected our understanding of the role of national and international institutions in defining the "rules of the game" for the conduct of businesses? How might views of business and its role in society be motivated by political-economic, legal, and institutional theories? How might these theories require modification in light of the emergence of NGOs?
- How does the rise of NGOs affect the power and resource-based views of business-government bargaining, the stakeholder and stewardship perspectives on the role of business & society, and the ethical and instrumental views of corporate social responsibility?

- What has been the impact of the increasing involvement of NGOs in legal and regulatory processes as they affect business? How have the outcomes of legislative and regulatory processes been altered by the insertion of NGOs into the policy framework, especially in the global context?
- What have been some of the experiences and outcomes of corporate-NGO collaboration? Have these relationships replaced, supplanted, or altered the traditional roles of governments in promoting or regulating corporate conduct?
- How are the structure, organization, and strategies of NGOs determined? How are they evolving? What kinds of networks and collaborative strategies have been used by NGOs to increase their reach and their ability to effectively influence corporations? Does research on social networks and collaborative strategy have relevance for the study of NGOs?
- Have international NGOs emerged as counterparts or complements to International Governmental Organizations (IGOs) such as U.N. agencies and multilateral development banks as relates to the conduct of business around the world?
- How can members of civil society not well-organized into NGOs influence the terms of corporate behavior, conduct, and governance?
- How are different types of NGOs (such as Environmental NGOs, Human Rights NGOs, Poverty Relief NGOs, and others) distinguished in terms of their impact on business? How do these different types of NGOs cause, operate and respond to changes in the business and policy environments, especially in a global and comparative perspective?
- What techniques and tactics employed by NGOs (e.g. education, corporate governance proxies, pressures on governments, protests) are most effective for influencing corporate behavior? For enhancing social welfare?
- How have corporations responded to the pressures by NGOs? Which responses may be more or less appropriate/effective depending on the issue, relationship, context, etc.?
- How have corporations used relationships with NGOs to improve public perceptions of their activities? Have such strategies resulted in measurable performance improvements in terms of social and economic impact?

We encourage submissions from a range of methodological approaches and epistemological traditions. In addition to the topics listed above, we encourage any topical explorations that speak to the general themes of this special issue. We are particularly interested in contributions from various countries and regions and those that employ multi- or inter-disciplinary perspectives.

Schedule and Submission Procedures

- Submission deadline is September 26, 2008.
- Please follow the *Business & Society* Submission Guidelines and Style Guide for Authors in the back of the Journal's most recent issue or Submission Guidelines on the *Business & Society* website. See: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsProdDesc.nav?prodId=Journal200878>
- Papers should be submitted to Nicolas Dahan (nicolasmdahan@gmail.com) or Jonathan Doh (jonathan.doh@villanova.edu)
- We expect this special issue of the *Business & Society* journal to appear in 2009.

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