Why Sparing the Rod does not Spoil the Child: A Critique of the "Strict Father" Model in Transnational Governance

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Abstract

The United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) is one of the largest transnational governance schemes. Its success or failure, however, is a matter of debate. Drawing on research in cognitive linguistics, we argue that when evaluators discuss the UNGC, they apply the metaphorical concept of the family: the UNGC corresponds to the "family," the UNGC headquarter to the "parent," the business participants of the UNGC to the "children" of the family. As a corollary, evaluators' implicit understanding of how a family is best organized sets different benchmarks against which the governance structure of the UNGC is assessed. We describe two ideal models of "educating" UNGC business participants. Critics of the UNGC adopt a "strict father" model of transnational governance based on the idea that the proper education of inherently "bad" business firms necessitates obedience, discipline and punishment in case firms are non-compliant. In contrast, the UNGC's advocates follow a "nurturant parent" model, which prioritizes empathy, learning and nurturance to support the moral development of "good" business firms. We develop the "UNGC-as-family" metaphor, explore its implications for transnational governance, and discuss under what conditions these idealized models can serve as appropriate guidelines for transnational governance schemes. Specifically, we posit that following the behavioral prescriptions of the "strict father" model may, under certain conditions, jeopardize the organizational embedding and institutionalization of UNGC principles, and explain when and why it may be in the best interest of the UNGC and civil society to embrace the instructions of the "nurturant parent" model of transnational governance.

Keywords: evaluators, metaphor, social judgment formation; transnational governance, United Nations Global Compact

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Because of its large membership base and the scope of its activities, the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) has attracted significant attention in the recent past (Rasche and Kell, 2010; Rasche et al., 2013). However, expert “evaluators” of the UNGC, such as policy-makers, academics, civil society activists and UNGC officials, differ markedly in their assessment of whether the UNGC actually helps corporate social responsibility (CSR) become effectively embedded in business firms participating in the UNGC. Moreover, whether the design of the UNGC is appropriate to its purpose has been subject to significant debate (e.g., Crane and Matten, 2013; Rasche, 2009). On the one hand, many critics (e.g., Deva, 2006; Nason, 2008) find that the UNGC has little impact on business operations and maintain that participation merely amounts to a public relations exercise that allows business signatories to “bluewash” unsustainable practices—that is, to unduly benefit from the legitimacy of the UN (blue being the color associated with the UN), without implementing UNGC prescriptions. In this vein, Sethi and Schepers (2014) argue that participation in the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) has not enhanced company performance and question the legitimacy and sustained existence of the UNGC. On the other hand, advocates of the UNGC point out that transnational governance is characterized by the absence of traditional state-based mechanisms with centralized authority and therefore requires the “orchestration” of polycentric networks composed of both public and private actors (Abbott and Snidal, 2010); in this context the “soft” and consensual approach of the UNGC constitutes a “necessary supplement” to regulatory approaches (Rasche, 2009) and offers an appropriate form of global organizing (Palazzo and Scherer, 2010; Scherer and Palazzo, 2011).

What explains the contested legitimacy of the UNGC? Which assessment of the UNGC is accurate and which policy measures are appropriate to the context of transnational governance, that is, how can companies that join the UNGC be induced to actually implement and live up to the policies and principles enshrined in the UNGC? Moreover, how can we enable the UNGC and other transnational governance schemes (TGSs) to make the world economy more sustainable and prevent these from merely serving as a fig-leaf for the unethical practices of business firms? The question of the contested nature and legitimacy of TGSs such as the UNGC is far from trivial, considering that TGSs have a profound impact on local communities and the environment (Scherer and Palazzo, 2011). Furthermore, because the interorganizational networks of TGSs and other forms of global organization challenge extant theories of organizing and social judgment formation, gaining a better theoretical understanding of these entities and the processes underlying their emergence will help build the theoretical foundations of this important, yet largely under-researched area (Djelic and Quack, 2008; Haack et al., 2013a).

The purpose of our article is twofold. First, by theorizing the deeper conceptual structure underlying the reasoning of evaluators, we seek to explain why the UNGC's nature is so intensely contested. Unlike the mechanisms of state governance, TGSs, as well as their organizational structures, procedures, and outcomes, are as yet poorly understood (Djelic and Quack, 2008; Stone, 2008). Drawing on research in cognitive linguistics (Lakoff, 1996; 2008; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980) and organization theory (Cornelissen, 2004; Schoeneborn et al., 2013), we argue that in order to make sense of the complexities of TGSs, evaluators often automatically apply concepts from domains they are more familiar with. That is, the conceptual structure underlying evaluators' reasoning about TGSs such as the UNGC is to a large extent metaphorical. This means that conceptual domains of primary experience with which the evaluator is more familiar co-occur with and are projected on more abstract domains with which the evaluator is less familiar. Specifically, we suggest that the target domain of the UNGC is organized and therefore understood in terms of the source domain of "family," where the governing individual (the UNGC leadership) is a "parent" and those governed (the business participants) are the "children" (Lakoff, 2008). The "UNGC-as-family" metaphor serves as an important heuristic in the assessment of the UNGC and represents a baseline concept that is common among UNGC evaluators. Importantly, UNGC evaluators have different ideas on how a family is best organized. These differences give rise to distinct ideals against which the governance structure of the UNGC is judged. UNGC critics follow a “strict father” model of transnational governance, where the authority figure of the father knows a priori what is right and what is wrong, and advocates discipline, obedience and punishment in case children do wrong. In the view of the strict father model, punishment and negative sanctions will strengthen the “character” of business participants and thereby make it likelier that these participants will implement UNGC principles (Deva, 2006; Sethi and Schepers, 2014). In contrast, UNGC advocates follow a “nurturant parent” model of transnational governance, which foresees that both parents resume responsibility for raising the offspring, but are aware that—in a world of unanticipated social challenges—they do not know a priori what the right course of action is. The model therefore emphasizes the role of exploration and experimentation as necessary prerequisites for children to learn and develop a capacity for creativity, self-discipline, and reflection, and, by analogy, stipulates that companies that sign the UNGC must not be overburdened with requirements but need time and leeway to learn about the implementation of CSR policies (Christensen et al., 2013; Palazzo and Scherer, 2010).

The second goal of our article is to critically assess the analysis of the UNGC by Sethi and Schepers (2014). We treat their article as a prototypical example of how the strict father model of transnational governance is manifested in the way in which UNGC critics think and talk about the UNGC. While the strict father ideal is intuitively appealing, as embodied in the work of Sethi and Schepers (2014), we point to its inherent limitations in the context of heterogeneous legal and moral expectations which are characteristic for a globalized economy (Scherer and Palazzo, 2008; 2011). We clarify that in the highly complex and dynamic setting of transnational governance it is often difficult to establish the authority of a “strict father” who knows a priori what is right and what is wrong. Enforcing a single "truth" with respect to CSR is problematic, as a standardized approach will be of little use in the context of fragmented institutional expectations (Kostova et al., 2008; Scherer et al., 2013). In fact, following the behavioral prescriptions of the strict father model may stall the process of institutionalizing CSR, as imposing moral strength and discipline forgoes the opportunity to make "small wins" (Weick, 1984) and alienates those business firms that most urgently need to be influenced; namely, business participants that lag behind in the implementation of CSR (Haack et al., 2012; Wickert and Schaefer, 2014). By contrast, following the "nurturant parent" model acknowledges that transnational governance is a social process that defies easy solutions premised on authority and immediate control (Scherer, 2003). We outline two self-reinforcing social mechanisms, "moral entrapment" and "upward competition," to elucidate the beneficial consequences of acting in accordance with the instructions of the nurturant parent model. The first mechanism describes the phenomenon that business firms who publicly commit to uphold the principles enshrined in a particular TGS can become "morally entrapped" as the awareness of being publically observed will pressure them to enact their promises (Christensen et al., 2013; Haack et al., 2012; Risse, 2000). The second mechanism refers to the growing competition for social approval among TGS participants which pushes them to increase their implementation efforts, leading to a "ratcheting up" effect (Cashore et al., 2007; Overdevest, 2010). In the context of the UNGC, this process is driven by the arrival of public comparison on the basis of certain criteria (e.g., quality of reporting) that the UNGC leadership, investors and other evaluators make among business participants (Baccaro and Mele, 2011). Importantly, we shall elaborate that the greater the number of business firms participating in the UNGC, the greater is the likelihood that the two social mechanisms take effect, illustrating the merit of low entry-barriers, few requirements, etc. to help establish a "critical mass" of UNGC participants (Bremer, 2008).

Overall, our article contributes to the growing literature on transnational governance and the UNGC in two ways. First, it theorizes the fundamental role of metaphors in the formation of social judgments in the context of TGSs such as the UNGC. Second, disclosing the tensions of the UNGC-as-family metaphor offers heuristic value and creates a novel understanding of the UNGC that goes beyond the existing literal accounts of transnational governance. Specifically, the article clarifies that following the prescriptions of the strict father may jeopardize the prospects of organizational learning and UNGC implementation as it cuts off the self-reinforcing process of public scrutiny, peer pressure, and "creeping" commitment which is constitutive of the institutionalization of CSR at a global scale.

THE ROLE OF CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR IN JUDGING TRANSNATIONAL GOVERNANCE AND THE UNGC

In this section, we develop our arguments on the UNGC-as-family metaphor in detail. We will begin by theorizing that evaluators perceive TGSs as families that have one head and various family members. We will go on to describe the basic assumptions underlying the "strict father" and "nurturant parent" models of transnational governance, outlining each model's behavioral prescriptions in the context of the UNGC.

The UNGC-as-Family Metaphor

Scholars tend to subscribe to either of the two dominant perspectives on the appropriate design of TGSs. The first view advocates, often implicitly, that transnational governance should be structured along the lines of national governance and that its representatives should be endowed with the regulatory capacities of a centralized authority (e.g., Schepers, 2011; Sethi and Schepers, 2014). The second view stresses the need for voluntary self- or co-regulation, pointing out that traditional state-based mechanisms with centralized authority do not operate on a global scale and that, consequently, effective global regulation requires the collaboration between public and private actors (e.g., Abbott and Snidal, 2010; Scherer and Palazzo, 2011). These conceptual antipodes in the scholarly discourse on transnational governance are manifested in conceptual distinctions such as "hard law" (characterized by explicit and legally binding obligations with a clear delegation of authority) vs. "soft law" (characterized by the absence of hard law) (Abbott and Snidal, 2000) or "strong-sword programs" (TGSs based on monitoring, public disclosure, and sanctioning mechanisms) vs. "weak-sword programs" (TGSs which lack public disclosure and sanctioning mechanisms) (Potoski and Prakash, 2005). Furthermore, authors have distinguished "governance by government" (hierarchical steering by public actors in a command-and-control approach) from "governance with government" (non-hierarchical coordination which involves both public and private actors) and "governance without government" (non-hierarchical coordination that involves only private actors) (Börzel and Risse, 2010; Rosenau and Czempiel, 1992). Finally, these differences are also reflected in the disagreement on how to nurture ethical behavior and rule-following within organizations such as business firms. Views range from the logic of "compliance," according to which the employees' behavior is controlled in a top-down fashion by precise rules about "dos and don'ts," surveillance systems, and sanctions, to the logic of "integrity," according to which employees follow general principles and policies, rather than detailed prescriptions, and are trained to apply their own judgments to moral challenges in situations that often cannot be anticipated due to complex and dynamic environments (Paine, 1994). The distinction between compliance-based and value-based ethics programs points to a similar direction (Stansbury and Barry, 2007).

We posit that the conceptual distinctions described above can be grounded in the theory of conceptual metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). The basic premise of the conceptual metaphor theory is that a metaphor is not only a linguistic device but also has a profound impact on how evaluators conceptualize and behave with respect to the evaluated entity. According to this view, metaphor refers to cross-domain mappings between conceptual domains, i.e. the correspondence of what is referred to as a "source domain" onto a so-called "target domain" (Evans and Green, 2006). Specifically, evaluators draw inferences from a cognitively familiar area (the source domain) to better comprehend a cognitively less familiar area (the target domain). These mappings are often "embodied" due to pre-conceptual experiences (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). For instance, evaluators have been found to draw on the concept of "space" to comprehend the more abstract concept of "time," such as in "we are looking forward to a brighter tomorrow" or "falling behind schedule" (Boroditsky, 2000, p. 4). Likewise, organization theory scholars have suggested that thinking and speaking of organization and organizing is inherently metaphorical in nature (Cornelissen, 2004; 2005; Schoeneborn et al., 2013), as exemplified by the use of anthropomorphic metaphors to describe organizational characteristics and functions, such as in the "organizational identity" and the "learning organization" metaphors (Cornelissen, 2005).

We extend this research in cognitive linguistics and organization theory to the analysis of evaluators' assessments of TGSs such as the UNGC. By "evaluators" we refer to various categories of observers who possess expert knowledge on TGSs and who have a personal interest in TGSs and their activities, such as academics, global policy-makers, TGS officials, journalists and civil society activists (Haack et al., 2013a). Given this definition, we perceive ourselves as "evaluators of evaluators," or as "second-order" evaluators who in the first part of the paper seek to theorize on the conceptual base underlying the reasoning of "first-order" evaluators of TGSs, such as Sethi and Schepers (2014). At the same time, in the paper's second part we partly operate as "first-order" evaluators in that we also judge the appropriateness of UNGC design. We use the term "transnational" to define interactions that span across national borders and, in contrast to agreements strictly between public actors, also include a range of private actors such as non-governmental organizations and business firms (Keohane and Nye, 1974). In turn, the concept of

TGS covers the self- or co-regulation of global policy issues, where the participant organizations that comprise an overarching TGS network may develop, negotiate, and enforce such regulations as well as provide global public goods, either in hybrid public–private partnerships or in associations between private actors without the support of public authorities (Haack et al., 2013a).

In previous research (Haack et al., 2013a), we distinguished evaluators from "intuiters," members of the public who lack the expertise and motivation to evaluate TGSs and their characteristics actively and therefore apply heuristics to judge the legitimacy of TGSs. At the same time we emphasized that the evaluator and intuiter concept represent two ideal types of social judgment processes and discussed the possibility that observers can switch between an evaluator and intuiter mode of judgment (Kahneman, 2011; Tost, 2011). That is, an intuiter may turn into an evaluator who deliberates carefully about a specific TGS. Likewise, an evaluator may turn into an intuiter who abstains from applying purely theoretical reasoning and instead draws on heuristics to make their judgment about a specific TGS. In the context of the present paper, we posit that expert evaluators often act as intuiters who draw on judgmental heuristics especially when their assessments and worldviews have become taken-for-granted and mentally entrenched (Berger and Luckmann, 1967). Specifically, we suggest that first-order evaluators draw inferences about complex forms of global organizing such as the UNGC by means of applying conceptual metaphors in judgment tasks.

Our rationale is particularly informed by research by the cognitive linguist George Lakoff (1996; 2008) who suggested that the conceptual domain of "family" plays a highly influential role in understanding and evaluating the target domain of "governing institution." He defines "institution" as "a structured, publicly recognized social group that persists over time," and "governing" as "setting expectations and giving directives, and making sure they are carried out by positive or negative means" (Lakoff, 2008, p. 85). Lakoff (2008) suggests that this conceptual metaphor is very powerful because evaluators experience governance for the first time during childhood and in the context of their family, where their parents mentor and educate them, tell them what to do and how to do it, e.g. making the bed and finishing their dinner. The correlation between early experiences of governance and family becomes embodied and forms a conceptual association that evaluators draw on in their reasoning and judgments later in life (Bougher, 2012). In view of this, we suggest that the belief systems and mental schemata of expert evaluators of the UNGC, including the contributors to this special issue, are structured, at least partly, around an overarching conceptual metaphor; namely, that of the "UNGC-as-family" metaphor. We propose that the family metaphor is the most basic concept evaluators draw on to judge TGS design and is key to understanding and troubleshooting the way in which TGSs function. According to this metaphor, the interorganizational network of TGSs is conceived of as a family with a "family head" and "family members." In the context of this metaphor, the UNGC leadership, as the "governing individual," functions as the "family head," whereas those being governed—the business participants in the UNGC—function as the "children" of the family. Table 1 provides a summary overview of the UNGC-as-family metaphor.

[Table 1 about here]

Significantly, the evaluators' understanding of how a family is best organized gives rise to specific ideals and expectations, against which they assess a specific TGS. Hence, for the context of the UNGC, we posit that a specific "family ideal" is projected onto the target domain of the UNGC from which evaluators draw an *idealized* conception of UNGC governance. Evaluators compare the ideal to actual instances of governance, e.g. they consider how the UNGC responds to their concept of wrongdoing on part of business participants. These operations occur often automatically and form the basis for subsequent judgments. Specifically, if these idealized prescriptions are met, evaluators grant legitimacy to the UNGC. In contrast, whenever the TGS's observed behavior is not congruent with the standards embodied by the ideal, evaluators do not grant legitimacy. In case of severe transgressions, evaluators disapprove of the TGS and confer "negative legitimacy" or "illegitimacy" (Haack et al., 2013a). In other words, the different ideals of various evaluators set different benchmarks against which the appropriateness of the UNGC or another particular TGS is assessed. Hence, in the context of the UNGC, on which we focus, identifying and describing these different ideals is a crucial step to understanding why the nature of this particular TGS is so fiercely contested.

Following works in cognitive linguistics on biconceptualism in political reasoning (Lakoff, 1996, 2008), we propose that evaluators contemplate transnational governance in terms of two different ideals, i.e. the "strict father" and the "nurturant parent" ideal. The strict father model assumes that raising a child appropriately requires the authority of a "strict father" who "knows" what is right and what is wrong, as opposed to children who do not know right from wrong. The strict father needs to be obeyed, and children need to be punished if they do wrong or do not heed the rules of the father. In contrast, the nurturant parent model does not assume the single authority figure of a strict father, but that of two parents with equal responsibility who help their children understand why there are "dos and don'ts" and how these are formed, without predetermining what the right course of action is. While in the strict father model the range of accepted behavior is restricted a priori, the nurturant parent model leaves room for maneuver and experimentation. We explicate the two models in further detail below. The two models represent diametrically opposed worldviews and evaluators holding these models will make very different recommendations with respect to TGS design and business regulation. Table 2 summarizes important assumptions and prescriptions of the two idealized models of transnational governance.

[Table 2 about here]

In order to avoid misunderstandings, providing a few clarifying explanations may be helpful at this point. First, the strict father and nurturant parent models are idealized conceptions of family life, meaning that holding a particular type of family model is not necessarily related to how evaluators were actually raised. In fact, evaluators may hold a family ideal in response to an opposed parenting style which they once resisted (Lakoff, 2008). Furthermore, in reality families do not represent a binary category but can be classified along a continuum where actual instances of family life encompass elements of both the strict father and the nurturant parent model. Nevertheless, we stick to the "binary" view of family as it allows us to parsimoniously build theory on the antecedents of social judgment formation in transnational governance.

Second, we cannot prove that the cognition of evaluators is structured around the UNGC-as-family metaphor as our article does not look into the heads of evaluators by means of psychological or neuroscientific methods. Nevertheless, our analysis is consistent with growing conceptual and empirical evidence that metaphors shape the evaluators' most basic understanding of their experience with their social and physical environment (Evans and Green, 2006). Specifically, evaluators have been found to use inference patterns from the conceptual domain of the family to reason about the conceptual domain of governing institutions (Lakoff, 1996; 2008). While there are other governing institutions that evaluators are familiar with, and which can produce alternative metaphors for the UNGC, including the market, the state or networks, Lakoff (2008) suggests that the family domain has a much stronger foundation in experience than the other domains of governance and therefore amounts to the most basic metaphor in evaluators' reasoning. Indeed, the pervasiveness of the family metaphor becomes apparent at the linguistic level, where governing institutions such as nation states are anthropomorphized through expressions relating to family, such as "Uncle Sam" or "Mother Russia." Likewise, the image of family is inherent in thinking and speaking in business terms, such as in “parent company” and “affiliate” in the context of the interorganizational networks of multinational corporations (e.g., Ghoshal and Bartlett, 1990; Kostova et al., 1999).

Finally, the UNGC-as-family metaphor may be perceived to lack precision or “fit” between target and source domain. Unlike business firms who can choose which governance scheme they want to engage with, children cannot select their parents. And in contrast to families, where one parent gives birth to the child (unless the parents represent a variant of biological parents, such as adoptive parents or stepparents), and where children are younger, weaker and usually command fewer resources than their parents, in the case of the UNGC and other TGSs, the business participants have not sprung or issued in any way from the organization in question. The fact that the UNGC involve sizeable corporations raises some doubts as to whether the UNGC-as-family we describe applies uniformly to TGSs: arguably, any big business firm (e.g., a multinational corporation) may be hierarchically a “child” but, if anything, a grown-up child, i.e. an “adult” in the context of the UNGC-as-family metaphor. Thus, the idea that e.g. the UNGC/parent can raise a business firm/child and form its moral attitudes is not fully meaningful. Furthermore, in terms of size, finances, and power, one could easily argue that many of the business participants of the UNGC are much bigger, stronger, and older than the UNGC itself, and well beyond their “formative years.” It follows that from the point of view that target and source domain lack similarity, the UNGC-as-family metaphor may not seem entirely plausible. However, extant organizational research has emphasized that metaphors should generate insights beyond the similarities required for comprehending the metaphor and argued that the greater the *dissimilarity* between target and source domain, the greater the likelihood that that conceptual metaphor offers “heuristic value” to the theorizing of second-order evaluators (Cornelissen, 2004; Schoeneborn et al., 2013). As elaborated below, the fact that the conceptual domains of the UNGC-as-family metaphor can be seen as distant from one another opens up possibilities for offering new and interesting insights into the domain of transnational governance.

The Strict Father Ideal

The ideal to which most UNGC critics subscribe, as we suggest, is based on that of the strict father. As Lakoff argues (1996, pp. 65–106), the starting point of this model is the view that the father has the "primary responsibility for supporting and protecting the family as well as the authority to set the overall family policy" (p. 65-66). This view, according to Lakoff, is based on the assumption that the father knows a priori what is right and what is wrong. The strict father further presumes that children are naturally "bad" on the grounds that they want to do what feels good, irrespective of whether it is "right." Given their "weak" character, the father "teaches children right from wrong by setting strict rules for their behavior and enforcing them through punishment" (p. 66). Thus, the strict father model is premised on the notion that administering punishment for violating rules will teach children to obey those rules, instill them with respect for legitimate authority and make them more self-reliant and self-disciplined. In consequence, punishment, even corporal punishment, is considered to support the moral development of children, whereas overindulging children is considered problematic. The proverb "spare the rod and spoil the child" epitomizes this view eloquently.

Overall, in the strict father family the values of strength, authority and purity have a high priority and form the basis of appropriate child rearing. By contrast, weakness, disobedience to authority, and impurity are regarded as deeply inappropriate (Lakoff, 1996; 2008). This means that in a strict father family children ought to be well-mannered—for example, to wash their hands before dinner. The idea is that imposing cleanliness makes children more susceptible to perceptions of "purity" and thus morality (Lakoff, 2008). Another common attitude is that that children should not keep bad company; namely, friends of doubtful character or origin.

Evaluators who embrace the strict father ideal of transnational governance ("strict fathers" hereafter) tend to hold a negative image of human nature and assume that managers, business firms and whole industries are involved in the decoupling of policy and practice; that is, that they are "free riders" who deliberately shirk responsibility (Bromley and Powell, 2012). In the view of strict fathers, business firms are "bad" and morally "weak" when they fail to embed effectively the prescriptions of CSR initiatives into their daily activities. Because strength and authority form the foundation of their morality, strict fathers believe that compliance with the prescriptions of TGSs can be improved through the proverbial rod, that is, negative sanctions and punishment. Strict fathers attribute shirking responsibility and free-riding to low entry barriers to CSR initiatives, lax enforcement mechanisms, loose reporting requirements and inadequate or weak governance structures. In contrast to these, they call for high entry barriers, stringent reporting requirements and accountability mechanisms and sanctions such as "delisting" non-compliant business firms (Benham and MacLean, 2011). In this view, monitoring the actual implementation of CSR practices helps promote ethical conduct in organizations and reduce the propensity for free-riding and adverse selection of low-performing companies, and thus promotes the institutionalization of CSR. Overall, strict fathers regard the commitments of business firms as deceptive promises and "cheap talk," and they therefore assess negatively the gaps between promises and performance, urging business firms to "walk the talk" (Weick, 1995).

Strict fathers are also concerned with "purity" in the context of transnational governance. Following the logic of "a bad apple spoils the barrel," they reason that association with "bad apples" (that is, underperforming or "tainted" companies) can endanger the integrity of a TGS. The risk of "contamination" necessitates strict measures to prevent the negative "spillover" of illegitimacy from an underperforming member to the TGS as a whole (Haack et al., 2013a). Such spillovers could “sully” (Sethi and Schepers, 2014, p. 6) the image and legitimacy of a TGS, and ultimately jeopardize its ability to acquire resources and influence to address policy challenges in transnational governance (Haack, 2013). The image of “purity” is pervasive in the public discourse on the UNGC, such as in “cleaning up the Global Compact” (The Guardian, 2012), “bluewash” (Global Compact Critics, 2010) or “dirty business” (Berne Declaration, 2007).

It is obvious that Sethi and Schepers (2014) are guided by the “strict father” ideal in their assessment of UNGC governance. Among other points, Sethi and Schepers criticize the lack of influence that the UNGC leadership has over the UNGC and its business participants, lamenting that compliance with UNGC principles is not verified and that business participants do not provide sufficient details as to how UNGC principles are implemented. In their view, the procedure of reporting on progress, which requires participants to disclose their commitment to the UNGC principles, lacks “teeth” (i.e. strength) and they describe it as inefficient and “unworthy of public trust” (2014, p. 20). The integrity and “purity” of the UNGC are criticized on the grounds of numerous “worst practices” such as the involvement of UNGC participant PetroChina in human-rights violations and the controversial nature of the UNGC-sponsored CEO Water Mandate. Sethi and Schepers (2014) characterize the “delisting” procedure as too lenient and imply that the increase in participant numbers, which the UNGC regards as a sign of success, can be attributed to the fact that wrongdoers and underperforming companies can stay in the UNGC without worrying about negative sanctions. Pessimistically, Sethi and Schepers (2014, p. 20) conclude that since its launch in 2000, the UNGC has failed to demonstrate any progress and will “continue to become wider and shallower by the day until it runs out of space and depth and becomes a dry bed of sand.”

The Nurturant Parent Ideal

In contrast to the strict father model, the ideal that, in our view, most TGS advocates espouse is the nurturant parent model (Lakoff, 1996, pp. 108–152). The nurturant parent model is based on nurturance, which in turn requires empathy and cooperation rather than control and rivalry. The "primary experience behind this model is one of being cared for and cared about, having one's desires for loving interactions met, living as happily as possible, and deriving meaning from mutual interaction and care" (Lakoff, 1996, p. 108). The nurturant parent family is not structured as a family hierarchy culminating in the authority figure of a father, but as a team, encompassing both a father and a mother who work together to help their offspring progress and become self-disciplined and self-reliant citizens. It rests on the assumption that children are born good and that it is the responsibility of the parents to be responsive to their children, to protect them and to support them so that they grow up well, retaining their innate goodness. Importantly, in this view children develop a "good character" and internalize norms of appropriate behavior primarily through social interaction and by observing others. Besides learning to take responsibility and to nurture themselves and others, children should enjoy a childhood and discover how things work through play. In contrast to the strict father model, this nurturant parent model argues that strict discipline and punishment are detrimental to the cause of child-rearing because they often trigger aggressiveness and anti-social behavior in children. It furthermore maintains that obedience should originate in the children's love of their parents and in understanding their parents' decisions, not in the fear of punishment. The nurturant parent is aware that proper conduct in life is challenging within the context of a complex social environment. As there is no one-size-fits-all recipe for happiness and success, children are empowered to deal with contingencies through continuous learning. In this perspective, children in their process of maturation need to embrace a high level of moral consciousness in order to be capable of developing a reasonable course of action in a complex and heterogeneous moral environment without the detailed guidance of their parents or any other authority (Habermas, 1990).

In contrast to strict fathers, proponents of the nurturant parent model ("nurturant parents" hereafter) tend to hold a positive view of human nature and believe that managers and business firms generally have a good character. Nurturant parents believe that corporate actors have good intentions but struggle to progress in their CSR efforts and would therefore benefit from support and learning opportunities (Palazzo and Scherer, 2010; Rasche, 2009). Dialogue between business firms and civil society actors facilitates the development of shared understandings of problems and potential solutions and the type and urgency of societal expectations with respect to the appropriate conduct of business firms (Ruggie, 2004). Importantly, according to the view of nurturant parents, for the efforts of business actors to implement CSR to succeed, these actors must not be forced to do something that they do not understand, i.e. they must not be obliged to hurriedly embrace novel and largely incomprehensible CSR policies (Christensen et al., 2013; Wickert and Schaefer, 2014). It follows that low entry barriers, lax reporting and accountability requirements may, in fact, be conducive to the institutionalization of CSR, because they allow business actors sufficient time to understand what they are supposed to do, which encourages business firms to enact their promises (Christensen et al., 2013; Haack et al., 2012). Nurturant parents appreciate or at least tolerate the gap between promise and performance, which Sethi and Schepers (2014) criticize in the context of the UNGC, because it provides business firms with the opportunity to "talk the walk" (Weick, 1995) and to experiment "with the possibility of becoming good" (March, 1989, p. 263). That is, while strict fathers regard decoupling and hypocrisy as negative, nurturant parents assess it favorably as a necessary stage in the process of enacting CSR prescriptions, taking the view that troubled companies require encouragement and learning opportunities, not discipline and punishment. Nurturant parents point out that "delisting" underperforming business participants means that the opportunity to motivate these companies to perform better in terms of the principles of the TGS to which they subscribe and to engage them in dialogue with other and potentially more advanced participants is lost (Haack, 2013). This signals that, on the whole, nurturant parents are forward-looking and take a dynamic perspective on transnational governance, whereas strict fathers tend to be backward-looking and embrace a static view of transnational governance (see Table 2).

WHY TRANSNATIONAL GOVERNANCE REQUIRES NURTURANT PARENTS, NOT STRICT FATHERS

Lakoff and Johnson remind us that "truth is always relative to a conceptual system that is defined in large part by metaphor" (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, p. 159). For all these reasons it is difficult to judge "objectively" whether the behavioral prescriptions of either of the models that we examined earlier—based on the strict father and the nurturant parent ideal respectively—offer an appropriate and effective path to the closing of the UNGC's "promise-performance gap" identified by the strict fathers Sethi and Schepers (2014). These difficulties notwithstanding, in this section we shall argue that there are good reasons for abiding by the recommendations of the nurturant parent model and elucidate why the strict father model may jeopardize a company's prospects of performing better with respect to CSR. We gain our insights from unpacking the tensions contained in the family metaphor, that is, the imperfect correspondence between the conceptual domains of the strict father family and the UNGC. Specifically, after outlining some limitations in Sethi and Scheper's analysis, we explain that the strict father family, which is characterized by clear and explicit rules and an all-knowing authority figure, cannot be fully mapped onto the complex and dynamic setting of transnational governance, which is characterized by a plethora of heterogeneous moral and legal expectations with no clear guidance on how to deal with such ambiguity (Scherer and Palazzo, 2011). Therefore, the pivotal premise of the strict father model is problematic; namely, that the enforcement of absolute rules, control and punishment for non-compliance will support the implementation of UNGC principles. Efficient and legitimate solutions to transnational policy challenges cannot be determined ex ante but need to be developed in a political and non-hierarchical process informed by mutual learning and dialogue (Palazzo and Scherer, 2010). Taking this perspective as a starting point, we explain that transnational policy-making should be guided by the instructions of the nurturant parent model and go on to outline two self-reinforcing social mechanisms to elucidate the beneficial consequences of acting in accordance with the instructions of this model.

What Strict Fathers Fail to Think

Sethi and Schepers (2014) provide a lot of factual evidence on which they base their criticism. Much of that evidence appears to be incontrovertible, e.g. on pp. 12-14 where they very reasonably question the ability of an auditor who is paid by those who are to be audited to deliver independent, objective, and valid judgments (a critique which would also apply to the current business model of auditing and accounting firms). The authors are also correct in pointing out that the CEO Water Mandate may illustrate a case where companies knowingly take advantage of the UNGC's stamp of approval to profit at the expense of the stakeholders who should be protected by the CSR principles. For instance, the question "Why are the corporate sponsors the only legitimate owners of the water issue?" (p. 17) is certainly valid, as is the observation "There is little room for concern, therefore, for other stakeholders such as the farmers and villagers who also depend on the same water for their sustenance and livelihood" (p. 17). This latter remark can also be considered indicative of Sethi and Schepers' support for the weakest members of the global family (to use our basic metaphor); those who, because of their position in the power hierarchy, are deprived of a voice and a say in matters that concern them and may indeed be of vital importance to them. From this point of view, Sethi and Schepers appear to question the old-fashioned, hierarchical allocation of power and control that is related to the strict father model, rather than support it.

Yet, by and large, Sethi and Schepers (2014) operate as strict fathers who criticize the "weaknesses" of the UNGC but abstain from outlining alternatives that "help" the UNGC to become "better". Furthermore, while Sethi and Schepers draw on the salient examples of PetroChina and the CEO Water Mandate to support their claim that the UNGC has failed to induce business participants to increase their CSR efforts, neither do they mention best-practice examples of successful issue-specific initiatives of the UNGC (such as the Principles of Responsible Investment), nor do they allude to instances where the UNGC tightened its standards (e.g., the case of the Lithuanian company Lifosa; Global Compact Critics, 2011). Surprisingly enough they also do not discuss the classification of business participants by performance (the "differentiation framework," see UN Global Compact, 2010a), nor its possible implications for the institutional trajectory of the UNGC (Baccaro and Mele, 2011). They furthermore disregard other important developments of the UNGC's post-2010 agenda, such as the issue- and sector-specific structuration of the UNGC network and the provision of a plethora of tools and learning opportunities, such as the "Blueprint for CSR Leadership" (UN Global Compact, 2010b) that support business firms in their efforts to implement the UNGC's principles.

Sethi and Schepers (2014, p. 1) suggest that "all credible and publicly available data and documentation conclusively demonstrate that the UNGC has failed to induce its signatory companies to enhance their CSR efforts and integrate the 10 principles in their policies and operations." Yet, empirical evidence shows that corporate signatories do implement the UNGC principles in various processes and procedures (Baumann-Pauly and Scherer, 2013; Baumann-Pauly et al., 2013; Centindamar and Husoy, 2007) and that the quality of implementation gradually improves over time (UN Global Compact, 2013a). Similarly, many of the UNGC's business participants have advanced the precision and scope of the communication-on-progress procedure, which, however, according to Sethi and Schepers (2014, p. 18) remains a "seriously flawed" process. Having analyzed the sustainability reports of several UNGC participants as consultants ourselves (first author), we can testify that many participants increasingly outline some of the key challenges to the implementation of the UNGC principles and also discuss strategies for overcoming such challenges. They furthermore communicate how these principles are embedded in their business operations, which targets they have set for a specific reporting period and whether the targets of earlier reporting periods had been achieved. For instance, UNGC participant British Telecom provides information on the degree to which benchmarks for non-financial indicators, such as "workforce diversity," have been met (British Telecom, 2011). Aggregate data compiled by the Foundation Gulié, a Swiss think-tank that provides assessment and benchmarking services that support the reporting efforts of UNGC participants, shows that both the comprehensiveness and the quality of the information provided in such reports have significantly improved in the last six years (Guilé, 2013). Specifically, Guilé (2013, p. 8) observed a "vast improvement in the clarity of information, but also in terms of reliability of the information disclosed, due to systemization of internal and external verification procedures (type audit) to validate the data published." Furthermore, in 2012, the UNGC executive director Georg Kell announced that henceforward the organization would be tougher with "free riders who joined but had no intention to stay engaged," signaling that in the future the UNGC would place greater emphasis on implementation (The Guardian, 2012). In sum, we observe that the material improvements in implementation and reporting described above are accompanied by equally important changes in the rhetoric, which indicate that the promise–performance gap that Sethi and Schepers (2014) identified is narrowing.

The laudable efforts by Sethi and Schepers (2014) to troubleshoot the UNGC are based on the strict father ideal with the a priori presumption of knowing what is right and what is wrong. This “moral absolutism” (Lakoff, 1996, p. 368) makes it difficult to consider systematically the social dynamics and complexity that characterize transnational governance, and it disqualifies the use of the strict father model as a guideline for transnational organizing and business regulation. Specifically, the “first-order” evaluators Sethi and Schepers do not notice the inherent tension between the source and target domain of the family metaphor. The tension stems from the mis-match of conceptual domains, that is, the dissimilarity between the strict father family where a specific set of rules applies uniformly to all family members for all time (the source domain) and the unpredictable environment of the UNGC where interests and expectations of key actors change rapidly and clear rules are lacking (the target domain). For “second-order” evaluators (evaluators of evaluators) it is evident that following the instructions of the strict father model may be appropriate in traditional societies defined by the culturally stable social context, where actors operate in situations of low complexity and uncertainty and experience and face relatively homogenous institutional expectations (Scherer and Palazzo, 2011; Scherer et al., 2013). Yet, the global environment of TGSs is characterized by a high degree of ambiguity and the prevalence of “super-wicked problems” such as the management of global climate change (Levin et al., 2012; Rittel and Webber, 1973). In such a context, the strict father model is likely to fail because both its uniform conceptions and prescriptions will be incompatible with the fragmented institutional environment of TGSs. Moreover, it is difficult if not impossible for the strict father to identify a priori the best possible solution to tackle a particular transnational challenge or governance gap. Therefore, as Overdevest and Zeitlin (2014, p. 23) explain, in transnational governance, “there is no single, unified body of hierarchically imposed rules governing a transnational issue area or policy domain”. Rather, what is considered right and what wrong needs to be determined through communication and continuous experimentation where “actors do not know their precise goals or how best to achieve them ex ante, but must discover both in the course of problem-solving, as well as on a polyarchic or multi-polar distribution of power, where no single actor can enforce a unilateral solution” (Overdevest and Zeitlin (2014, p. 26). In fact, the unsuccessful attempt by the UN Commission and Centre of Transnational Corporations to craft binding regulations for globally operating business firms reveals that strict fathers have already failed in the 1970s (Sagafinejad, 2008).

In the following, we will delineate the antecedents and consequences of two social mechanisms, “moral entrapment” and “upward competition” to specify that following the behavioral prescriptions of the strict father model is detrimental to the cause of transnational governance and the UNGC. On this basis, we will discuss why nurturance and empathy, which the nurturant parent model embodies, offer a promising path to increasing a company’s CSR performance.

Moral Entrapment

The first social mechanism that can lead to superior CSR performance is “moral entrapment” (Haack et al., 2012) or “argumentative self-entrapment” (Risse, 2000, 2004). As a result of this mechanism, business firms “talk” themselves into changing their behavior and the organizational reality through public announcements. In our context, business firms that pledge publicly to uphold the principles enshrined in a particular TGS can become “morally entrapped.” In other words, the knowledge that they will be held publicly accountable for their behavior may force them to start enacting their promises. This process is moderated by various factors, such as the costs of organizational change (Scherer et al., 2013). The lower the costs, the more likely the TGSs will adapt their behavior and “walk the talk”.

The concept of moral entrapment is illustrated in a recent case study by Haack and his colleagues (2012), who analyzed the evolution of a principle-based TGS in the field of international project finance, the Equator Principles Association. The authors found that commercial banks that formally adopted the Equator Principles reacted to the criticism by civil society by publicly promising to increase their efforts to implement those principles. Haack et al. (2012) cite material developments, such as the creation of new job functions and training programs in specific firms, and demographic changes in the organizational populace as tentative evidence that a firm's promises to reform, even if initially hypocritical, can have "real" consequences. These promises, they argue, created a "creeping commitment" that led the financial institutions under study to actually practice what they preached. Similarly, Christensen and his colleagues (2013) suggest that "aspirational talk," i.e. the rhetorical pledge to reduce the gap between actual and projected reality, eventually leads CSR to take deeper roots within organizations. In this view, communication is a formative activity that constitutes organizational practice: talk provides "raw material for (re)constructing the organization" (Christensen et al., 2013, p. 376). Thus, although organizations may need to go through a phase of sustained learning until formally adopted practices come into force the interaction with "significant others," i.e. the public at large, induces a transformation in corporate priorities which leads to the tighter coupling of policy and practice. Counter-intuitively, the contested practice of greenwashing may contain the seeds of its own demise and amount merely to transitory phenomenon—it may even be a necessary condition for organizational and social change (Haack et al., 2012; see also Hallett 2010, Tilcsik, 2010).

It follows that, in order to increase the impact of moral entrapment, it is important to maximize the number of business firms that formally commit to a specific TGS. Increasing the participation in a TGS will boost its influence and induce the perception among business participants that the TGS "has the right to rule" (Buchanan and Keohane, 2006, p. 405). The growing diffusion and recognition of the TGS signals that the principles of this TGS are valid and ought to be followed, even in the absence of a traditional authority. In contrast, when a TGS sets high entry barriers and strict requirements, only a relatively small number of business firms will participate in the TGS. As a result, the self-reinforcing mechanisms moral entrapment and creeping commitment will be limited to a rather small set of companies and the TGS will fail to exert influence on the majority of business firms. A TGS that lacks prominence and pervasiveness will struggle to achieve the status of validity and the participant business firms will be less inclined to internalize and comply with that TGS's prescriptions (Haack, 2013). It follows that the prescriptions of the "strict father" model may erode the prospects of global sustainability.

Thinking about the antecedents and consequences of moral entrapment, it becomes clear that the UNGC's emphasis on "growth by numbers" (Sethi and Schepers, 2014, p. 15) and its "20,000 by 2020" strategy (i.e. the objective to reach 20,000 participants by the year 2020; UN Global Compact, 2013c) may represent a highly effective approach to institutionalizing CSR. In fact, in order to leverage its principles, the UNGC should increase its efforts to recruit low-performing companies as such companies would benefit the most from interaction with more advanced participants. Furthermore, in order to increase its impact, the UNGC should also keep its "bad apples," even if these negatively affect the overall legitimacy of the UNGC (Haack, 2013). A lenient and "soft" approach to transnational governance not only gives companies the opportunity to learn and experiment with CSR, but also allows TGSs to maneuver a larger number of business firms into moral entrapment. That is, the requirements of a TGS must be low as only then will business firms join, which is a necessary (albeit insufficient) condition for a TGS to be effective (Cashore et al., 2007). Of course, in the conceptual system of strict fathers such a proposition is nonsensical or "provocative" at best (Crane and Matten, 2013). Embracing greenwashing and freeriding lets wrongdoers get away with impunity, a practice that is largely inconsistent with the behavioral prescriptions of the strict father ideal. Nevertheless, there is growing evidence that moral entrapment is an important mechanism that significantly improves CSR performance, above all in the medium and long term (Christensen et al., 2013; Haack et al., 2012; Wickert and Schaefer, 2014).

Building on the above, next we will introduce the concept of “upward competition” and further substantiate the point that, in the context of transnational governance, quantitative growth (i.e. an increase in formal commitments) is a necessary condition for qualitative growth (i.e. improvement in actual implementation).

Upward Competition

Besides moral entrapment, there is a second social mechanism that motivates business firms to increase their efforts to implement TGS principles, “upward competition.” Upward competition describes the aspiration of business firms to “race to the top” because of upward pressure on business practices due to differentiation (Cashore et al., 2007; Overdevest, 2010). Differentiation refers to publicly visible distinctions that TGS evaluators can draw among the business participants of a TGS, that is, the categories into which they classify participants on the basis of certain criteria, such as quality in reporting. For instance, in 2010, the UNGC, in an effort to accommodate both the protection of its integrity and the provision of learning opportunities, introduced a “differentiation framework” with three performance levels of reporting: basic, intermediate, advanced. This framework was designed “to help all companies in the Global Compact improve sustainability performance and disclosure and to give recognition for progress made” (UN Global Compact, 2010a). In the spirit of the nurturant parent model, the UNGC put a moratorium on delisting companies from non-OECD/G20 countries on the grounds that it was difficult for these countries to provide thorough reports on their implementation efforts (Haack, 2013).

Importantly, the differentiation framework allows for public comparison and benchmarking which reveals whether the UNGC's business participants are low-performing laggards or high-performing leaders in reporting their implementation efforts thus enables TGS evaluators to better discriminate between good and bad performers (Baccaro and Mele, 2011; Haack et al. 2013b; Lee and Kohler, 2010). Differentiation reduces the risk of adverse selection because it makes it more difficult for free-riders and low-performing companies to exploit the "legitimacy commons" of a particular TGS, i.e. to benefit from the legitimacy of the TGS that its participants share by extension (Haack, 2013; Haack et al., 2013a; see also Barnett and King, 2008). It follows that the participants that are identified as leaders have an incentive to take advantage of their competitive advantage, continue to excel and distinguish themselves from laggards, whereas laggards have an incentive to strive to catch up in order to avoid competitive disadvantage and low status (Börzel et al., 2011). Leaders will therefore draw attention to the relative differences among TGS participants whereas laggards try to deflect these differences, deliberate on their underlying causes, and scan their environments for innovations and best practices (Overdevest, 2010). Again, these activities are moderated by the costs of organizational change (Scherer et al., 2013). The lower the organizational costs of upward competition, the more easily TNCs will engage in these efforts. Thus, overall, differentiation leads companies to "ratchet up" their efforts to implement the principles of the TGS to which they subscribe and narrow the gap between promises and performance so fiercely criticized by Sethi and Schepers (2014).

In addition, in the process of upward competition various TGSs and TGS sponsors started to enforce transparency by setting up organizational bodies that make public the formal commitments of business firms. A case in point is the launch of the Website "UN-Business," a web platform where business firms and private sector organizations document their commitment to advance UN goals und UNGC principles. These organizations must stipulate time-bound and measurable targets and include an "agreement to publicly disclose, on an annual basis, progress made to realize the commitment" (United Nations, 2014a). For instance, in line with the UNGC's Education First initiative (www.globaleducationfirst.org), the Swiss multinational and UNGC participant Nestlé announced plans to improve access to education, providing detailed information on scope, target and time frame of scheduled activities (United Nations, 2014b). Although it needs to be seen to what extent business participants are willing to commit publically to specific and time-bound targets, the UN-Business platform supports evaluators to hold business participants of the UNGC accountable to their promises, enhance efforts of "social vetting" (Wynhoven and Stausberg, 2010), and facilitate public benchmarking and comparison within individual industries and sectors. A similar tendency can be observed in the case of other principle-based TGSs, such as the Equator Principles Association, which introduced various measures related to disclosure and differentiation over the past few years, such as improved reporting and information sharing among participants (Equator Principles Association, 2014).

The beneficial effects of differentiation are enhanced by evaluators such as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and financial investors, who praise business firms that score high in the quality of disclosure or pressure laggards to comply with the UNGC principles (Baccaro and Mele, 2011). The pressuring of UNGC participants by investors to scale up their implementation efforts (Financial Times, 2010), as well as the 2013 launch of the UN Global Compact 100 Index, a stock market index of UNGC participants with superior CSR commitment and profitability (UN Global Compact, 2013b), are important means of differentiating between laggards and leaders in the implementation of the UNGC principles. The LEAD initiative where highly engaged UNGC participants commit to implement the UNGC principles at a superior level "to reach further, to experiment, to innovate, and to share learnings," further illustrates the growing scope of differentiation (UN Global Compact, 2011). Likewise, NGOs have made their "naming and shaming" strategy more sophisticated, with more fine-grained comparisons and rankings of business firms and practices. For instance, based on a comprehensive set of criteria, the Swiss NGO Berne Declaration classifies business firms operating in the outdoor sports sector into three categories: summiteer (superior performance), following (average performance) and ignoramus (low performance) (Berne Declaration, 2014). These developments indicate that differentiation from the "inside," where TGS participants compare their CSR practices with their competitors, is supplemented by differentiation from the "outside" (Overdevest, 2010). Importantly, in the context of the UNGC, the process of differentiation and upward competition is endogenous to this TGS's system and stems from the social interaction among UNGC participants and evaluators—the sanctioning mechanism of an external regulator is not required (Haack et al., 2013b; Overdevest and Zeitlin, 2014). In fact, as Haack et al. (2013b) have shown in a formal model of CSR institutionalization, imposing sanctions too early (i.e., before a TGS has attracted a minimum degree of participation) prevents business firms from ratcheting up their efforts, which raises further doubts on the validity of the "strict father" model of transnational governance.

Overall, differentiation, combined with increasing public scrutiny, has the potential to fuel the self-reinforcing dynamics of "moral entrapment" and "upward competition" that we described above, and may ultimately lead to the institutionalization of the UNGC principles. If both the UNGC and its evaluators continue to classify participants on the basis of their performance with respect to its principles and publish reliable information on the ranking of UNGC participants, "the resulting 'soft' sanctioning power has the potential to alter corporate behavior in the long run" (Baccaro and Mele, 2011, p. 451).

DISCUSSION

The main purpose of our paper was to theorize on the deeper conceptual structure underlying the worldview of evaluators of transnational governance, as well as to appraise critically the validity of the assessments of TGSs that stem from these conceptual structures. We have drawn on research in cognitive linguistics to show that conceptions of transnational governance are organized around the "UNGC-as-family" metaphor which informs two diametrically opposed models of "educating" business firms that participate in TGSs, the strict father model and the nurturant parent model. Correspondingly, we proposed that TGS evaluators can be categorized into two groups: strict fathers, who stress the benefits of strength and discipline, and nurturant parents, who emphasize the pivotal role of care and empathy in advancing the moral development of business firms. We identified a fundamental tension underlying the strict father ideal and explained that in contrast to the family context, in transnational governance key actors hold heterogeneous interests and expectations, and there is no centralized and all-knowing authority to impose a single set of rules. Thus, the strict father model may not offer appropriate guidelines for TGSs and business regulation. In this final section we briefly discuss the paper's contributions and outline possibilities for future research.

Contributions

The contribution of our article to the literature on the UNGC and TGSs is twofold. First, we develop an account on why the legitimacy of the UNGC is fundamentally contested by proposing that the mindset of evaluators is structured around the UNGC-as-family metaphor and that they automatically apply this conceptual metaphor to judge the UNGC and its activities. The family domain is the most basic experience of evaluators with governance and is therefore constitutive of other conceptual domains of governance. In this view, the existing conceptual distinctions of transnational governance (e.g., "hard law" vs. "soft law") and corporate governance (e.g., "compliance" vs. "integrity") are derived from, or at least informed by, conceptions of idealized family models ("strict father" vs. "nurturant mother") which, as we propose, are shared by many evaluators. The benefit of specifying the UNGC-as-family metaphor and applying it to the analysis of legitimacy in transnational governance lies in the disclosure of the often tacit assumptions in the thinking and discourse of “first-order” evaluators. If our analysis is correct, extant explanations and theories of transnational governance ought to be reconsidered, as reasoning about transnational governance is fundamentally metaphorical and often carried out unconsciously, a proposition which is in line with recent research on the heuristic foundation of social judgment formation (Bitektine, 2011; Haack et al., 2013a; Mishina et al., 2012).

Our second contribution lies in the critical analysis of the assumptions and behavioral prescriptions of the strict father model of transnational governance. Specifically, we recommended that the solutions put forward by strict fathers ought to be considered carefully. We showed that in the context of transnational governance the pivotal premise of the strict father model is problematic; namely, that a single authority can determine appropriate solutions to complex policy challenges and that control and punishment will support the implementation of CSR. In light of evidence that high-entry barriers and rigorous enforcement mechanisms in fact limit the implementation of CSR to a small number of companies (Haack et al., 2012; Haack et al., 2013b), we argued that the strict father model of transnational governance undermines the very objectives it seeks to achieve. We therefore advocated promoting the nurturant parent model, with its focus on experimentation and learning. Our position is that efforts to build and consolidate transnational governance will only succeed when business actors make sense of the disruption of profit-driven routines and habits that societal demands for CSR causes, and when unfamiliar and incomprehensible practices become meaningful to these actors in a way that supports CSR behavior and prompts them to enact these practices (Weick, 1995). In fact, the high entry barriers and more rigorous enforcement mechanisms that the “strict father” model envisions may undercut experimentation, innovation, and organizational learning, slow down the institutionalization of CSR or limit it to a small number of organizational actors. In contrast, through the process of moral entrapment und upward competition, formal commitments—even if they are hypocritical in the beginning—allow a large number of business participants to learn about sustainability and experiment with, embrace and enact a new way of conducting business. Allowing laggards more time, providing them with resources that will help them overcome organizational barriers and using the "soft" sanctioning power of differentiation and public comparison can prove more fruitful than using "the rod" that the strict father ideal favors. Our article thus clarifies that evaluators need to assess TGSs "not only on the basis of their appropriateness at present, but what they might do to trigger a global 'race to the top' at a later time" (Cashore et al., 2007, p. 158). Ultimately, the "promise–performance gap" of the UNGC can be seen as a necessary condition for CSR to take root among the least "promising" business participants of TGSs (Haack et al., 2013b).

Future Research

The question whether the practice of greenwashing and decoupling in business organizations is indeed transitory and can lead to long-term changes is central to the current debate on CSR (Christensen et al., 2013; Haack et al., 2012). In the forward-looking nurturant parent model, action ("performance") follows from talk ("promises"). In other words, communication that signals commitment to CSR (such as pledging publicly to uphold the UNGC's principles) can be seen as constitutive of behavioral change and tighter coupling. From the nurturant parent's point of view, talk and action are inherently intertwined and not two separate realms, as implied by the static analysis put forward by Sethi and Schepers (2014).

Future research needs to further specify the boundary conditions and dynamics under which the nurturant parent model induces business firms to implement TGS principles. As mentioned above, the processes of moral entrapment and upward competition are likely to be moderated by the costs of organizational change of the involved firm. However, if engagement with CSR becomes a widespread phenomenon within one industry, the costs of adapting organizational structures and procedures become a cost of doing business and will not negatively affect the competitive position of firms (Scherer et al., 2013).

In our view, the analysis of the role of public scrutiny in influencing corporate CSR behavior will constitute an important research frontier. As argued above, without the critical gaze of society-at-large and public pressures to enhance CSR performance, moral entrapment and upward competition are unlikely to thrive, meaning that social evaluation amounts to an important prerequisite for CSR to become embedded in the structures and operations of business firms. In the image of our central metaphor, by acting as a collective judge rather than a centralized authority, the public resumes the role of distantly related "uncles" or "second cousins" who in the context of the larger "global family" watch the children and support the parents in their child-rearing duties. By extension, corporate leaders in CSR implementation function as older "siblings" who help their less advanced "brothers and sisters" deal with the challenges of "adolescence," and also act as an important conduit through which the pressure of the larger family context is exerted. Hence, even though the strict father is missing in transnational governance, the demand for transparency and accountably is shared by the larger family, that is, by the general public and the peers of low-performing companies. This conceptual extension of our basic metaphor is only partly compatible with the prescriptions of the nurturant parent model of transnational governance. The theoretical tension between strict father and nurturant parent ideals can be solved by acknowledging that the proper moral development of children is a multi-stage process and requires both nurturance and the setting of rules. While in the first stages of its development, the child should receive unconditional love and be able to experiment with its surrounding, subsequent stages require that parents, with the support of other family members, set rules and define "dos and don'ts" to ensure that the child becomes a self-disciplined and autonomous citizen. By analogy, the UNGC and other TGSs may benefit from the careful and gradual tightening of TGS requirements for business participants. Initially, a TGS ought to embrace the instructions of the nurturant parent ideal but eventually follow the prescriptions of the strict father model, in this way maximizing the likelihood that business firms increase their efforts in CSR implementation. Thus, it is possibly only in the blending of various "parenting styles" that we reveal a novel and promising path to institutionalize CSR (Haack et al., 2013b).

Conclusion

The common wisdom of "spare the rod, spoil the child" is doubtful—indeed, there is vast evidence in research on child development and childrearing that corporal punishment is not an effective means of raising autonomous and self-disciplined children but induces aggressiveness and anti-social behavior (Greven, 1991). By analogy, we have argued that punitive approaches are often neither feasible nor appropriate in the context of transnational governance (Abbott and Snidal, 2000; Rasche, 2009; Scherer and Palazzo, 2011). We encourage Sethi and Schepers (2014) and other adherents of the strict father metaphor to take responsibility and explore more systematically the social mechanisms underlying the institutionalization of CSR, and to contribute to the development of a theory of transnational governance. If we do not put fundamentally different and potentially more effective models to the test and specifying the boundary conditions under which the models apply, we will never know whether the current set-up in transnational governance is indeed flawed, or simply the best that we can achieve in a complex world.

Table 1: The UNGC-as-Family Metaphor

Target domain	Source domain
The governing institution [the UNGC]	The family
The governing individual [the UNGC leadership]	The parent
Those governed [the business participants]	The children

Table 2:
The Strict Father vs. the Nurturant Parent Ideal of Transnational Governance

	Strict father	Nurturant parent
Moral basis	Strength, authority, purity	Nurturance, empathy, partnership
Key assumptions	Business firms are naturally bad. Because of the firms' inherent weakness, they need to be controlled and disciplined.	Business firms are naturally good. Firms can be made better through support and nurturance.
	The strict father knows a priori what is right and what is wrong and teaches firms to comply with absolute rules.	The nurturant parent is aware of the complexity of the world and teaches firms to cope with this complexity.
Prescriptions	Administer punishment in cases of wrongdoing.	Provide time for exploration and experimentation.
Assessment of promise-performance gap	Negative, because TGS principles are not implemented.	Positive, because business firms can make sense of implementation.
Approach	Static, backward-looking	Dynamic, forward-looking
Examples	UNGC critics: Deva, 2006; Sethi and Schepers, 2014	UNGC advocates: Palazzo and Scherer, 2010; Rasche, 2009

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