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Governance through Learning: The UN Global Compact and Corporate Responsibility

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Report



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FOREWORD

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to provide insights to processes of international governance in the field of Corporate Responsibility (CR). To date, institutions for CR often lack formal and regulatory mechanisms to induce change in corporate policy and practice. This study examines how and to what extent *informal* governance mechanisms such as learning and norms entrepreneurship can generate changes in how business actors recognize and approach their social and environmental responsibilities as global citizens. To this end, the paper appraises the largest and most ambitious institution of this kind; the UN Global Compact (GC). Using documentary data and in-depth interviews of management personal in British and Norwegian firms, the study demonstrates how the UN GC's governance model defined as the "learning approach"; diverge in terms of successfully invoking processes of learning between participants. While the paper establishes that a rationalist approach employed through schemes of best practice dissemination has failed to produce any significant learning; an approach corresponding largely to a discursive learning model has produced some desirable results within the target group. The paper alleges that in the context of governance through the UN GC, learning should not be understood as a rational- but a discursive process, enabled through deliberative forums and a "logic of arguing". In the course of learning as such, actors appear to gain new information about CR related issues and problems, and to reflect upon new norms, principles and ideas. The study thus illustrates how governance is not simply about formal rules but about normative influences generated in informal settings through arguing and deliberation. The paper argues that while popular criticisms posed to the UN GC regarding measures of accountability and transparency are not misplaced (see Corporate Watch, 2002; Amnesty, 2003; Bendell, 2004), they nevertheless neglect the de-facto role that learning and normative influences can play in governance networks; in terms of building awareness and catalyzing changes in companies CR policy, and invoking processes of social construction of corporate identities as social and environmental agents. This provides a constructive dimension of GC engagement often disregarded by its critics. Yet, much remains to be done in order to strengthen the GC learning approach. In essence, the GC should reconsider its governance through learning model along the recommendations of this study. This involves in particular a reassessment of the on-line learning forum and COP policy, which to date has failed to deliver its desired objectives. Finally, a discursive model for learning and a deliberative forum design should be utilized more explicitly and strategically by the GC Office, to reinforce its learning approach moving into a more mature phase

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1 INTRODUCTION

The issue of how international institutions can govern the activity of transnational business effectively to promote a more sustainable world economy remains contentious and unresolved. In recent years, a number of voluntary initiatives designed to encourage enhanced social and environmental performance in business has emerged, however most of these institutions remain weak; lacking formal structures of governance, effective accountability systems, while depending on voluntary membership (See Calder and Culverwell, 2004). Instead companies are encouraged to implement norms, principles and strategies of corporate responsibility (CR)¹, and to regulate and manage their activity voluntarily and autonomously. Questions concerning how and to what extent international institutions as such can deliver improvements in companies' social and environmental performance, will continue to stand as an important field of enquiry for academic scholarship in the years to come.

This paper seeks to substantiate the debate regarding the influences and effects of corporate responsibility institutions on the business sector, by conducting a study of processes of governance through the largest and most ambitious of such institutions; the UN Global Compact (henceforth UN GC). The UN GC governance model is structured around a normative framework consisting of 10 principles within the areas of human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption (GC, 2005b), which the GC asks companies to embrace and enact upon within their sphere of influence. The GC clearly recognises that it is not a regulatory instrument designed to enforce change in business practices, but rather a 'value based platform designed to promote institutional learning' (Kell and Levin, 2004:44). Thus as an alternative to regulatory steering, the GC Office relies upon inducing change in participating companies by means of a "learning approach". This governance model is designed to stimulate processes of learning between participants, through which the GC's normative framework is assumed to fuel improvements in companies' social and environmental policy and performance.

This study thus seeks to examine and assess the influences and achievements of the GC "governance through learning" approach. While it is widely acknowledged that ideas and norms play an essential role in political change for sustainable development, the extent to which the normative sway of the 10 GC principles has had any impact beyond generating advanced rhetoric in participating companies, is questionable. This paper examines the potential of norms and "learning" to challenge traditional business identities as economic agents² towards embracing in addition social and environmental responsibilities. More specifically, the paper assesses the various GC engagement mechanisms' relative success in terms of invoking processes of learning. Learning is used here as an indicator of the

¹ Corporate Responsibility is defined broadly as a concept which encourages companies to measure, manage and mitigate the negative environmental and social impacts of their activities, while maximizing the positive. The concept in practice often involves implementing strategies of transparency, ethical behaviour, environmental management and collaborative dialogue with the various stakeholders that a business affects. (Sustainability, 2004: CORE, 2003)

² Referring to Milton Friedman's classical view that the primary and perhaps sole purpose and responsibility of the corporation is to maximise profit (Friedman, 1980)

diffusion of corporate responsibility norms and the GC principles throughout the participating business community. The core assumption is that learning as such can generate constructive changes in corporate identities and approaches to environmental and social issues, which in succession fuel enhanced social and environmental practices in business.

The theoretical approach adopted can largely be accommodated within the constructivist paradigm, and relates directly to the agenda of investigating the causal power of norms and ideational configurations in global politics (see Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998; Finnemore, 1996; Ruggie, 1998; Adler, 1997; Checkel, 1998). The paper does not attempt to provide a full impact assessment of the GC by measuring its effects of on the outcome of business practices, but to explore processes of normative influences and social constructions of corporate identity. Thus the rationale behind this study is to explore the nature, extent and premises of normative change through the UN GC.

The first section of the paper provides an introduction to the political context in which the GC emerged. Thereafter follows a presentation of the UN GC Network's organisation and structure, and the principles upon which it is based. Subsequently the paper clarifies and makes explicit the specific engagement mechanisms that the GC offer to participants, and what appears to be expected from these – beyond being broadly defined as learning mechanisms. The next section of the paper reviews literature relevant for approaching the study of learning through the GC engagement mechanisms. The paper first classifies types of learning relevant to the GC, and moves on to discuss different ways to conceive of processes of learning, with emphasis given to rationalist, institutionalist and discursive models respectively. The aim is to develop a framework that provides an overview of how different 'social logics of action' may advance learning and norm diffusion, a perspective which is then used to structure the final discussion and analysis. The following section outlines the methodology of the approach, and a research model for analysing learning through the GC. Subsequently follows a comparative case study of the GC engagement mechanisms. This study is based on data gathered through a documentary analysis of the GC learning data-base, and from in-depth interviews with 6 participant companies. The final chapter presents an analysis of these engagement mechanisms, and examines the rationale behind them, with reference to rationalist and discursive models in the context of the social-logic approach presented earlier. The aim of the paper is that these findings should serve to demonstrate the ways in which institutional design, social logics, learning and CR norm diffusion are interrelated. It will be argued that learning through the GC should not be seen as a rational but a discursive process, which emerges in the context of deliberation and collaborative dialogue amongst participants. The paper alleges that while the GC engagement mechanisms relying on a rational model learning have been largely unsuccessful, the engagement platforms which correspond to a deliberative forum design appear to have invoked considerable learning, in particular at the local level. It will be argued that while popular criticisms posed to the GC regarding measures of accountability are not misplaced (See Corporate Watch, 2002; Amnesty, 2003; Bendell, 2004), they nevertheless neglect the de-facto role that learning and normative influences can play in terms of building awareness and catalyzing changes in companies CR policy, while invoking processes of social construction of corporate identities as social and environmental agents. A major implication of the study is that the Global Compact should

employ a more explicitly discursive and deliberative approach in promoting its 'governance through learning' policy in the future.

2 THE UN GLOBAL COMPACT – CONTEXT, PRINCIPLES AND STRUCTURE

2.1 The political and systemic context of the UN Global Compact

The UN GC was proposed by the Secretary-General Mr. Kofi Annan in an address to the World Economic Forum in Davos 1999. In his speech, Annan expressed concerns over the rising negative effects of economic globalisation, and called on business leaders to participate in a new UN initiative with the objective to build a more inclusive, just and sustainable world economy (Annan, 1999). While controversies over the consequences of globalisation subsist, it is widely acknowledged and that the market is increasingly escaping political regulation (Giddens, 1999; Strange, 1996; Held et al, 1999; Beck 1999), and that the growing role of private actors in the world economy has generated reconfigurations in political power (Dicken, 1998; Stange, 1996; Held et al, 1999; Lake and Kahler, 2003). The UN GC reflects the attempt to deal with growing unease about the ‘governance gap’ created by economic globalisation, and a new effort to manage and influence the activity of multinational corporations (Kell and Levin, 2004; Ruggie, 2003), after the closing down of the UN Centre for TNCs (UNCTC) in 1990.

Transformations generated by economic globalisation have also resulted in rapid increases in systems of international governance (Held et al, 1999). The term governance is traditionally associated with governmental steering by regulation or sanctions, but has recently moved on to include other forms of steering through new policy instruments such as voluntary agreements (VAs) and market based instruments (MBIs). Governance thus may be defined as the totality of such ‘mechanisms’ and ‘instruments’ available for influencing social change (Lafferty, 2004:5). The GC reflects this tendency for the public sector to delegate responsibility for achieving sustainable development through using new policy instruments (see Jordan et al, 2003). The underlying assumption is that VAs such as the GC, while being prone to suspicions of ineffective monitoring, sanctioning and free-riding, nevertheless have the potential of promoting increased cooperation and trust between business, governmental agencies and NGOs; and to promote learning (Börkey and Lèvêque, 2000; Delmaas and Terlak, 2002). Global governance similarly (see for example Rosenau, 1992), has recently been conceptualised in less state centric terms than traditional International Relations realism; recognising the growing role of private and civil society actors, and the tendency for them to engage in governance arrangements and regimes. Falkner defines this as ‘private governance’, which involves ‘interactions among private actors, or between private actors, civil society and state actors’ which ‘give rise to institutional arrangements that structure and direct actors’ behaviour in an issue specific area’ (Falkner, 2003: 72-73). The UN GC network similarly challenges the conventional distinction between public and private, and reflect the expansion of cooperative efforts among a constellation of actors in ‘network society’ (see Castells, 1996; Hajer and Wagenaar, 2003; Beck, 1999)

Characteristic of governance furthermore is the rapid increase in international regimes and institutions. Institutions not only refer to material entities such as organisations (Haas,

Keohane and Levy, 1993), but to sets of rules of the game or codes of conduct that serve to define social practices, assign roles to participants in these practices, and guide the interaction among occupants of these roles (Young, 1994). The GC is perhaps best defined as an international institution as such, by its nature of providing a normative framework which defines appropriate codes of conduct and which seeks to guide interaction amongst its participant companies. The concept of regimes is furthermore relevant to the conceptualisation of the GC. Regimes, referring to sets of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which actors' expectations converge in a given area of international relations (Krasner, 1983); can similarly to institutions be defined in non-material terms; as sets of ideational and normative structures which have a constitutive power on accepted forms of social behaviour (Kratowil and Ruggie, 1986; Rittberger, 1997). The GC corresponds to this definition (see also Keohane, 1989; Rittberger et al, 1997; Young, 1994), but without the state-centric emphasis (see Haufler, 1995) and which can be accommodated within a constructivist, knowledge-based approach (see Kratochwil and Ruggie, 1986). Defining institutions and regimes from a social-constructivist perspective; as non-material, ideational and normative configurations that shape the ways in which actors perceive their interests – and which may influence how particular problems and their solutions are learnt – indeed make sense in the context of the UN GC.

Hence this paper is less concerned with formal rules, paying attention rather to non-coercive steering geared towards changing actors' interests and identities (See for example Risse and Börzel, 2002). Because the UN GC does not possess any formal authorities, its 'success' depends largely on the influence of normative concepts and ideas, its potential being locked in its capacity to exercise influence over business through the advocacy of norms. Thus this paper endeavours to investigate how norms – in the context of global governance for CR – can define, guide, steer and legitimate (business) actors' interests, behaviour and identities with respect to sustainable development.

2.2 Principles, Structure and Organisation

Since its launch, the UN GC has grown into an international network of nearly 2200 companies, with additional labour, civil society and other participants (McKinsey and Company, 2004). The GC is based on 10 CR principles, derived from The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Labour Organization's Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, and the United Nations Convention Against Corruption. The GC Office asks companies to embrace, support and enact upon these principles within their sphere of influence, and to integrate them into their core business operations (The GC, 2005b). This set of normative pronouncements reflect the aspiration of the UN to manifest CR into a set of universally accepted norms for business conduct, and the public recognition of the private sector as a key player in the endeavour to achieve sustainable development and social justice. The 10 GC principles are listed in Box 1.

Box 1

The 10 Principles

Human Rights

Principle 1: Business should support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights; and

Principle 2: make sure that they are not complicit in human rights abuses

Labour Standards

Principle 3: Business should uphold the freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining

Principle 4: the elimination of all forms of forced and compulsory labour

Principle 5: the effective abolition of child labour;

Principle 6: the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation

Environment

Principle 7: Business should support a precautionary approach to environmental challenges

Principle 8: undertake initiatives to promote greater environmental responsibility, and

Principle 9: encourage the development and diffusion of environmentally friendly technologies

Anti-Corruption

Principle 10: Business should work against all forms of corruption, including extortion and bribery

The Compact is not a traditional UN agency or an international organisation, but an expanding set of networks which comprises companies – whose actions it seeks to influence – international labour, transnational NGOs, governments, and university based research centres (The GC, 2005b) At its core is the Global Compact Office; which main functions are to provide strategic direction, policy coherence and quality control (Ruggie, 2003); and the Advisory Council. The GC Office also collaborates with 6 other UN agencies – the Office of the High commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). In addition the GC encourage the creation of local networks at the country and regional level, with the aim to support the implementation of the 10 principles by invoking mutual learning and information exchange between participants. There are now approximately 40 local networks in operation (The GC, 2005e).

The current status of the GC qualifies broadly as an ‘Inter-Organisational Network’ (ION) (Kell and Levin, 2004: 47). IONs are formed by autonomous organisations combining their efforts voluntarily to achieve goals they cannot reach as effectively or at all on their own (Ruggie, 2003; Chisholm, 1998). The GC has furthermore been classified as a ‘Learning Network’ (Ruggie, 2003, Kell and Levin, 2004), defined by Knight (2002:428) as groups of organisations that interact with the purpose of learning together, from one another and through their interaction. The GC has also been typified as an aspiring global public policy network (GPPN) (Kell and Levin, 2004); which is referred to as a sub-category of learning networks. GPPNs seek to generate collective understanding

that produces societal learning and change through global policy or independent, action based solutions (Kell and Levin, 2004:49)

As previously noted, the GC does not aspire to induce change in business practices through enforcement by means of providing a formal regulatory structure, but rather to 'bring about corporate change through the use of a *learning approach* that facilitates discussion between the various groups' (The GC 2002:4, Ruggie, 2003:27). It is these features that attribute the GC its distinct character as a voluntary 'learning network'. Now, how is the 'learning approach' pursued in practice? The following section will look specifically at the institutional design of the GC, i.e. its formal and informal engagement mechanisms designed to promote learning.

2.3 The UN Global Compact engagement mechanisms

4 main areas constitute the essence of the GC's networks activities (Kell and Levin, 2004). First, the concept of 1) '*Learning Forums*', is central to GC engagement. On the one hand, the GC has developed an *on-line Learning Forum*; a database which invites participants to share good practices through the GC web portal. The aspiration of the GC Office is that this arrangement establishes itself as a repository of corporate practice, to 'form a platform of knowledge that integrates the views of all relevant stakeholders, while simultaneously increasing the transparency of companies' activities' (The GC, 2005d). In this database, companies can submit practice cases and read experiences from other organisations working to implement the 10 principles. Related to the on-line learning forum is the 'Communication on Progress' (CoP) policy, although this is not strictly a learning tool. In the CoP website portal, companies are required to provide a link to their website with a CoP report or a sustainability report, in order to avoid being disclosed as inactive (The GC, 2005c). On the other hand, the GC holds annual *learning forum conferences* to which participants are invited to share experiences of working with the Compact (The GC, 2002; Kell and Levin, 2004), which typically include presentations of best practice case studies and panel discussions (Sampson, 2005; Sullivan, 2005).

The GC also holds 2) global '*policy dialogues*'. These are multi-stakeholder dialogues and held on a single issue basis. The aim is to discuss issues related to contemporary challenges of globalisation and CR, and to provide a key platform for substantive discourse (The GC, 2005). Dialogues have been held on subjects such as sustainable development, supply chain management, and sustainable consumption (The GC, 2005f).

Third, the GC supports the spawning of 3) '*local networks*' at the country or regional levels, with the aim to support the implementation of the 10 principles and CR norms. There are now approximately 40 networks in operation (the GC, 2005e). This paper will use the GC Nordic Network (GCNN) and the UK Network as examples. Finally, 4) '*multi-stakeholder collaborative development projects*' are fostered through participation in the network.

It is relatively unclear what the GC Office expects these engagement mechanisms to achieve. Indeed, no clear indicators to sought accomplishment are explicitly stated by the GC Office. Yet GC special advisor Ruggie (2003: 32) notes that the Learning Forums may be perceived as the main mechanism through which the GC is to invoke change. According to Ruggie, the learning forums are expected to occasion a dialogue related to what constitutes 'good practices', establish a reference bank for CR norms, and to drive

out 'bad practices' by means of dialogue and transparency. It may thus be assumed that the GC Office expects the on-line learning forum and the learning forum conferences to invoke *learning* through i) dissemination of CR norms and information related to 'good practices' and ii) dialogue between participants related to CR norms and 'best practice' cases of principles implementation. The policy dialogues, similarly to learning forum conferences, seem to be expected to invoke learning through discourse and dialogue. What is expected from local networks on the other hand, appears unclear. The paper proceeds however, on the assumption that policy dialogues and local networks may serve a similar purpose in terms of invoking learning processes as may the learning forums.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Classifying the Types of Learning Relevant to the UN Global Compact

Learning is a multifaceted concept which may relate both to i) changes in concrete outcomes and to ii) changes at the level of ideas and contemplations. This paper endeavours to explore the latter dimension. Learning thus may be seen as linked to the constitutive and prescriptive power of norms, i.e. the process of norm emergence and promotion involving standards of appropriate behaviour, which influence actors' perceptions of their roles and responsibilities and which may construct new identities and interests (See Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998). This paper conceives of learning as such and uses the following operational definition of learning, drawing on the work of Webler et al (1994), as a reference point for the study of learning processes invoked by GC engagement mechanisms. Learning thus may entail 1) the acquirement of new information and knowledge related to CR norms and principles, and furthermore to implementation matters and their possible consequences and solutions; 2) learning about- and being able to consider and take on the subjective impressions, values and preferences of others; 3) to reflect about own interests and integrate new knowledge into one's own opinion in the light of new information and perspectives, and 4) learning how to cooperate with others in solving collective problems. This paper argues that these components may be seen as central to the ideational and normative dimension of learning, i.e. the diffusion of CR norms and ideas, and therefore may serve as indicators in the study of learning processes and norms diffusion through the GC.

Learning can emerge at both the individual (psychological) level, or at the level of an organisation (Webler et al, 1995). *Organisational learning*, defined as organisations institutionalising new structures, routines or strategies that create change (Knight, 2002), however is interrelated to *individual learning*, as 'it is individuals acting as agents of organisations that produce the behaviour that leads to learning,' [while] organisations can create conditions that may significantly influence what individuals frame as the problem, design as a solution and produce as action to solve a problem' (Argyris, 1992: 8; Busenberg, 2001).

Recently, *inter-organisational learning* has received growing attention from scholars in disparate disciplines, based on empirical research reporting organisations' efforts to learn through the interaction with others (Knight, 2002). This type of learning has been described as 'learning across [policy] coalitions' (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1999:123), and 'learning through policy networks' (Busenberg, 2001); referring to processes of learning that take place within and between networks of multiple organisations and individuals. Similarly, inter-organisational learning has been defined as 'learning from the experience of others' (Levitt and March, 1988) referring to the diffusion of interpretations of experience and routines from one organisation within a community of organisations to another. The diffusion of CR norms generally, and the GC principles in particular, can be seen as resulting from such interaction and exchange of experiences, either at the

individual level or at the level of the organisation. It should be noted however that measuring the extent to which a ‘trickle down’ of CR norms from the individual representing an organisation in the GC is beyond the scope of this paper.

Knight (2002) argues for an additional and distinct mode of learning; namely ‘*network learning*’. This involves learning by organisations *as a group*, not as individuals. Furthermore learning related to CR norms may also be seen as a type of *policy oriented learning*, defined as ‘alternations of thought or behavioural intentions that result form experience and/or new information, and that are concerned with attainment or revision of policy objectives’ (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1999:123)

3.2 Processes of Learning

First, learning may be considered to be a purely rational process, whereby individuals perceptions related to a particular issue is changed in response to new and additional information (see Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1999). Learning processes may thus be interpreted as the effect of agents instrumentally seeking new approaches to particular issues, to find alternative means for dealing with policy goals. Within this framework, improving access to information is assumed to enable learning capacities and results (Betsill and Bulkeley, 2004)

This conception of learning is in line with a ‘rationalist’ account of social behaviour, or what March and Olsen (1989) call a ‘logic of consequentialism’. This is the realm of instrumental rationality, which treats social actors as egoistic utility maximizers seeking to optimise one’s own interests, whose preferences are seen as predominantly fixed during processes of interaction (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998; Ruggie, 1998; Risse, 2000).

Recently, a rationalist model for ‘best practice’ dissemination has gained increasing attention within policy communities, and the assumption that information dissemination can lead to diffusion of norms and policy change has become an accepted wisdom within many national policies, in international institutions and networks that seek to promote sustainable development (Bulkeley, 2004). The idea is that ‘best practice’ dissemination within a policy network can lead to ‘policy transfer’, defined by Dolowitz and Marsh (2000:5) as processes by which knowledge about policies or administrative arrangements is transferred from one political unit or organisation to another. The production of best practice is usually found in the form of a written case-study, in reports and policy documents, or in web-based data bases (Bulkeley, 2004:10). In part, the GC learning forums; in particular the on-line forum in its attempt to disseminate ‘best-practice’ cases, appear to reflect this trend.

Second, learning may be interpreted as a process influenced more by normative and structural factors than by instrumental rationality. One account can be accommodated within the realm of Sociological Institutionalism, which emphasise the rule and norm guided element of behaviour; and that actors often try to do ‘the right thing’ rather than simply optimising given preferences (Risse, 2000; Ruggie, 1998). March and Olsen (1989) describe this as a ‘logic of appropriateness’; that actors internalize roles and rules as scripts to which they conform, not simply for instrumental reasons—to get what they want—but because they understand the behaviour to be good, desirable, and appropriate. Learning may thus result from individuals internalising new norms, principles and rules which become institutionalised as routines within an organisation (Levitt and March 1988). One

may expect such learning processes to be invoked through the GC engagement mechanisms, by means of CR norms and the 10 principles having a constitutive effect upon participants.

Alternatively, learning can be understood as a discursive process. While the term discursive may take on a variety of meanings, this paper uses the simplest definition of 'discourse' as the sum of communicative interactions (Sharp and Richardson 2001). Learning may be interpreted as emerging in the context of communication and interaction. The discursive approach to learning corresponds to Risse's (2000) Habermasian notion of a 'logic of arguing', which asserts that 'processes of argumentation, deliberation, and persuasion constitute a distinct mode of social interaction to be differentiated from both strategic bargaining- the realm of rational choice- and rule-guided behaviour- the realm of sociological institutionalism' (Risse. 2000:1). According to Risse, a 'logic of arguing' emerges when actors deliberate about particular issues, enabling issues and problems to be re-framed and re-evaluated as pre-established interests, perceptions and preferences of actors who are open to discursive challenge (see Owens and Rayner, 1999). It should be noted that the 'logic of arguing' is not entirely distinct from the logic of appropriateness, as communication and deliberation may act as enabling variables of CR norm diffusion and internalisation by actors and subsequently institutions and organisations. Both logics are linked to the constitutive effect of norms and identities, implying that actors' interests, preferences and perceptions are no longer fixed but subject to challenge and reformulations.

In public policy contexts, discursive learning approaches are often related to the concept of deliberative democracy (Dryzek, 1987; 2000; Elster, 1998), and deliberative/participatory planning and decision-making procedures (Smith, 2001; Petts, 2001; 2003; Saarikoski et al, 2001). Deliberation is defined as '*reasoned discussion for and against*' (OAD), or as *communication through dialogue* that '*induces reflection upon preferences in a non-coercive fashion*' (Dryzek, 2000), and relates to Habermas' (1984) communication theory and Risse's logic of arguing'. Thus learning may be interpreted as a discursive process that emerge in the context of deliberation, which enables revision of argument, views and interests (Saarikoski et al, 2000; Smith, 2001), and which may alter fixed preferences, rather than simply register them (Dryzek, 2000). Some have argued that deliberation may enhance social responsibility amongst its participants, and promote integration of values (Petts, 2003; Smith, 2001). As such, deliberation offers a type of engagement mechanism through which CR norms and the 10 principles of the GC may be diffused.

4 METHODOLOGY: A RESEARCH MODEL FOR ANALYSING LEARNING

This section outlines a research model used for evaluating learning related to CR norms and the 10 principles specifically through the GC. Due to limited data available as regards the different engagement mechanisms, it was necessary to adopt a qualitative rather than a quantitative research approach. To date, the only written documentation publicly available are submissions by GC participants in the on-line learning forum, while no written documentation exists of the learning forum conferences, policy dialogues or local networks. The paper therefore conducts a documentary analysis of the on-line forum; which involved primarily reading and interpreting the material available on the GC website; while the evaluation of the remaining arrangements build on data gathered through 6 in-depth, taped interviews with participant companies from Norway (3) and the UK (3). The use of a qualitative case study approach had the advantage of enabling an in-depth study of participants own interpretations and experiences.

Thus the methodology employed in this paper can be accommodated within a hermeneutic and interpretative research tradition. In terms of reliability, referring to the correctness and preciseness of the data, this research technique- which relies extensively upon the data gathered through interviews- will naturally be limited in terms of possibilities to generalise, for example from the experience of the Nordic Network to other networks. Furthermore it should be noted that only one of the interviewees had participated in policy dialogues, which weakens the validity – referring to the possibility of drawing valid conclusions from the material (Yin, 1994:35) – of this study. Although the general validity of the case study furthermore does not satisfy statistical criteria for causal explanations, it nevertheless offers an interpretative account of the inter-subjective perceptions of the interviewees in relation to processes of learning and CR norm diffusion. Given the subjectivity of the research technique adopted, every effort was made to mitigate the potential of bias sneaking into the process, and to account for the interviewees perspectives in an objective and direct fashion.

The paper evaluates the GC engagement mechanisms expected to generate learning in turn. These are the on-line learning forum, the global learning forum conferences, the global policy dialogues and the local network meetings. It should be noted here that data gathered through interviews additionally comment on Communication on Progress (CoP), because all the interviewees regarded these as potential documents from which they could learn. A documentary analysis of CoPs is not included however, due to time constraints.

In assessing these arrangements and the extent to which they appear to have generated learning, the paper draws on the work of Webler et al (1995) in deducing an operational definition of the components of learning, as introduced previously. Furthermore the data will be presented and organised in accordance with a set of indicators constructed, with the aim to highlight the accomplishment/deficiency of the components of learning. These are i) Use / Participation of/in engagement mechanisms, ii) Quality of information provided, and iii) Communication and other quality characteristics. The rationale behind constructing these indicators are, first, that establishing the frequency of the use of- or

participation in the various engagement mechanisms may say something about their influence on participants, and clarify the rationale behind companies choices to use or not use; and participate or not participate. Second, assessing the quality of information provided is assumed to serve as an indicator of the possibility for companies to attain as draw new knowledge from that information, and for this information to enable learning and reflection. Third, assessing 'communication' is intended to illustrate how forms of communication seem to have contributed to participants acquiring new knowledge related to CR norms and the GC principles implementation, to learning about other stakeholders and participants values and interests, to reflection upon own interests and to changes in how participants conceive of their own role, responsibilities and appropriate future CR practices. The objective is furthermore that this indicator may shed light on the learning – deliberation hypothesis which will be discussed in the analysis. Finally, 'other characteristics' is a heading, under which other interesting issues relevant for this analysis that were raised in the interviews, are placed.

5 CASE STUDY: LEARNING CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY THROUGH THE UN GLOBAL COMPACT

5.1 Assessing the Global Compact Engagement Mechanisms

5.1.1 The On-Line Learning Forum

Use / Participation: In the period from 2002-2005, participating companies (2208) have submitted 293 examples, 75 case studies and 32 projects in total. Out of the total of 13 Norwegian GC signatories, 3 companies have submitted an example, 2- a case study, while none have submitted a project. Out of the total of 58 UK signatories, 9 companies have submitted an example, 5- a case study, while 1 has submitted a project (The GC, 2005g). 9 Norwegian Companies have submitted CoPs, while 9 UK companies had submitted 2 CoPs, 15 1 Cop, hence 24 UK companies in total (The GC, 2005h). As the records show, a small number of companies have submitted examples and cases in the on-line learning forum.

All the interviewees affirmed that they did not use the on-line learning forum, or that it was at least strictly limited (Sullivan, 2005; Moseid, 2005; Myrmel – Johansen, 2005; Kopstad, 2005; Sampson, 2005; Morgan, 2005). All stated that use was restricted to specific searches. As Sampson (2005) argued, the GC data-base ‘isn’t a way of communication regularly. I don’t think people that have signed up for the GC in the UK regularly visit the GC website.’

Several of the interviewees (Sampson, 2005; Sullivan, 2005; Morgan, 2005; Kopstad, 2005) pointed out that they had limited time and resources to search and read for case studies and reports. As Sampson argued, ‘people working in business don’t have time to go surfing. I think if you want to get people’s attention, you have to get them to meetings.’

Quality of Information: Examples and cases submitted in the data base were 1-3 pg descriptions of a policy undertaken by the company that relates to one or more of the GC principles. Each example and case study reviewed was considerably general in their approach. For example, KLP insurance outlines their socially responsible investment and work environment policy, which briefly presents their approach to labour standards and human rights. Yet specifics concerning the implementation of these GC principles were absent. This deficiency in terms of sketching out *how* CR norms and GC principles had been put to practice was a general trend for all the examples and cases reviewed. In effect, the examples and cases bore resemblance of marketing texts more than examples of good methodologies for policy implementation (The GC, 2005j)

All the interviewees stated that submissions have not been specific enough to enable learning, and furthermore expressed concerns in terms of the quality of submissions (Sullivan, 2005; Sampson, 2005; Myrmel-Johansen, 2005, Moseid, 2005; Kopstad, 2005). Several of the interviewees agreed to Sampson’s (2005) argument that ‘best practice’ case studies are perceived by business ‘much more as an opportunity for a projection of a company than for a projection of good methodology in itself’. Moseid (2005) furthermore

argued that the amount you can learn from best practice cases is limited, a view shared by several of the informants. 'I'm generally sceptical about 'best practice' learning, because they rarely account for the context in which a specific policy has evolved... so you don't know the causes of why this particular practice worked', she emphasised. 'Companies usually write useless accounts of success stories- instead of trying to communicate what have been the challenges, what emerged as possible solutions, and especially what *didn't* work'.

Several of the interviewees pointed out that they also regarded CoPs as document from which one might learn about CR norms institutionalisation and CR practices of other companies. However, all expressed dissatisfaction with the quality. 'You have to admit, the CoPs is a big joke! Moseid (2005) stressed. 'Nobody checks what you write in the CoP...and the format makes it very difficult to use it for learning purposes'. Some of the interviewees pointed out that they did read other companies' CR reports, but not through the GC website, due to the reports' lack of quality (Kopstad, 2005; Myrmel – Johansen; 2005; Moseid, 2005).

The above results indicate that the *use* of the on-line learning forum is poor, and furthermore that the *quality* of submissions and information in them is low, in that they lack sufficient specificity and accounts of the context of norms and policy implementation. In addition, the case studies resemblance to marketing documents and the apprehension that the amount you can learn from best practice cases is limited, is noteworthy. It thus seems reasonable to suggest that processes of CR information and knowledge transfer through the on-line learning forum appear restricted, and that limited learning therefore has been generated by this engagement mechanism.

5.1.2 Learning Forum Conferences

Participation: 3 interviewees (Morgan, Moseid and Myrmel – Johansen) had never been to a learning conference, while 2 had been to some (Sampson and Kopstad). The main cause mentioned for non-participation, was lack of interest and resources available (Myrmel – Johansen, 2005; Sampson, 2005; Kopstad; 2005).

Quality of information: Some of the interviewees claimed that the 'best practice' cases presented at the learning forums, for example on supply chain management and conflict prevention, adopted a too 'universal' approach with the implication that they were not perceived as relevant to their own practice (Kopstad, 2005; Sampson, 2005). 2 claimed they were not likely to take the information 'home' with them (Sullivan, 2005; Kopstad, 2005), while one claimed he had not learned anything at all (Sampson, 2005)

Communication and other quality characteristics: All the interviewees expressed scepticism towards the capacity of learning forum conferences in terms of generating communication between participants (Sampson, 2005; Sullivan, 2005; Kopstad, 2005; Myrmel – Johansen, 2005; Moseid, 2005). Both Kopstad (2005) and Sampson (2005) claimed they had found it difficult to 'network' and to communicate with other participants at the meetings they had attended, due to dissimilarities in business interests as well as divergences in cultural and linguistic characteristics.

The informants also stated that the approach of the conferences, resembling big lectures which allowed only one person to speak at a time, was unproductive in terms of

learning. 'The most productive use of time is to break out groups, where you have smaller groups, so that people can interact', Sampson (2005) argued.

These results indicate that attendance at learning forum conferences is not a given priority for all GC participants, and that they due to its 'big lecture approach' have produced only small or modest learning in the form of CR related information and knowledge attainment, while learning about other stakeholders and participants views and reflection appear restricted by lack of communication.

5.1.3 Policy Dialogues

Participation: only 1 interviewee (Sullivan) had been to several policy dialogues, a noteworthy low attendance. The aim of this section is thus not to generalise with reference to policy dialogues performance but to account for a viewpoint that may serve to highlight aspects in discussion GC engagement mechanisms generally.

Quality of information and Communication and other characteristics: the interviewee stated that policy dialogues, by their nature of being smaller and issue specific, in her experience had generated in-depth deliberations on CR norms and GC principles, for example businesses role in protecting human rights. Such deliberations, according to the interviewee, stimulated information attainment and norm diffusion (Sullivan, 2005). The interviewee expressed considerable enthusiasm about the dialogues and claimed she found them to represent an excellent communicative medium through which different interests and perspectives could be aired and discussed (Sullivan, 2005). She also expressed that the different viewpoints which emerged in the context of multi-stakeholder deliberation had made new, previously unconsidered perspectives to come to light which made her reflect and re-evaluate her own approach and practice. The interviewee also claimed that she was likely to take the new information gained with her and integrate it into her own company's practice. (Sullivan, 2005)

This viewpoint indicates that policy dialogues bear the potential of invoking learning processes by means of multi-stakeholder deliberations, in terms of CR related information attainment, learning about the subjective preferences and views of other participants, and reflection and integration into own view and practice.

5.1.4 Local Network meetings

The GC Nordic Network (GCNN) was launched in 2000 and consists of participants from Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland. The GCNN holds 2 annual meetings which are multi-stakeholder, and the forum has recently established a 'focal point', i.e. a contact person/organisation, to alternate every 2cond year (Moseid, 2005; Myrmel – Johansen, 2005). The UK Network was launched in 2003. The UK holds approximately 4 meetings annually, and the forum is headed by a steering group and consists of different sub-groups working on various issues (Sampson, 2005; Morgan, 2005)

Participation: All of the interviewees participate in local networks, and their policy is to attend every meeting held (Morgan, 2005; Sampson, 2005; Sullivan, 2005; Myrmel – Johansen, 2005; Moseid, 2005; Kopstad, 2005)

Quality of information: All the interviewees stated that they had found the information acquired through local network meetings, either through presentations or through

dialogue, interesting, valuable and relevant for their own practice, and for learning purposes. (Sullivan, 2005; Morgan, 2005; Sampson, 2005; Myrmel – Johansen, 2005; Moseid, 2005; Kopstad, 2005).

Communication and other characteristics: According to the UK interviewees, the UK Forum serves as a framework for sharing experiences related to CR between participants (Morgan, 2005; Sampson, 2005; Sullivan, 2005). As Sampson (2005) - the head of the UK Forum- argued, ‘we usually make time for one of our signatories to talk about their own personal experience, in relation to living up to the policy commitment [...] everybody always finds that [multi-stakeholder deliberations] really interesting and productive’. Morgan similarly stated that, ‘for me the most valuable thing at those meetings is when a member holds a presentation, and we talk about their approach to a specific element of the GC, or a specific element of corporate responsibility. It is really useful, to discuss how other companies are approaching CR.’

All the UK interviewees emphasised the value of multi-stakeholder deliberations (Sullivan, 2005; Morgan, 2005; Sampson, 2005). As Morgan argued, ‘for me the main appeal [of the local network meetings] is derived from them being something where different stakeholders get together on a regular basis, to look at issues from different perspectives, and to share learning. And I think that for me the face-to-face network meetings work far better than for example on-line information sharing.’

The standard agenda on GCNN meetings is that a company holds a presentation about how they have tackled the implementation of one of the GC principles, followed by an exchange of experiences, dialogue and discussion (Moseid, 2005; Myrmel – Johansen, 2005). All the Norwegian interviewees stated that they conceived of the GCNN as a first-rate communications platform through which they could establish new relationships and contacts with other participants (Myrmel – Johansen, 2005; Moseid, 2005; Kopstad, 2005). As Myrmel – Johansen (2005) argued, ‘I now know other companies that have dealt with different GC related issues successfully, so that I can give them a call when I’m trying to solve a similar matter’.

All the Norwegian interviewees were enthusiastic about the GCNN. As Myrmel – Johansen (2005) put it, ‘if it hadn’t been for the Nordic network, the GC wouldn’t have been any good [...] this is the place where we really learn something.’ Moseid (2005) correspondingly stated that ‘everyone is very pleased with the open dialogue we’ve had in the network meetings’. All claimed that the deliberations in GCNN meetings had been open, critical and constructive (Moseid, 2005; Myrmel – Johansen, 2005; Kopstad, 2005). Myrmel – Johansen (2005) stated that companies and NGOs challenge each other’s views, and that deliberations often resulted in constructive suggestions and solutions related to CR norms implementation. For example, at the last meeting, the 10th principle on anti-corruption was discussed as such in length. This followed a newspaper publication accusing a Danish GC participant of corruption. ‘This proved a good opportunity to discuss the norm on anti-corruption...and clearly showed the need to deliberate on how we can solve this still eminent problem’, Moseid (2005) argued.

All the interviewees claimed that it has been the deliberations following ‘best cases’ presentations that has resulted in reconsiderations of own approach to CR norms and practice (Moseid, 2005; Kopstad, 2005; Myrmel – Johansen, 2005). As Myrmel – Johansen argued, ‘often when we deliberate on why and how something was done, I think it actually leads to real change in how we approach and solve things.’ Moseid (2005) and

Kopstad (2005) pointed out that smaller group deliberations usually produce the most open and 'intimate' dialogues. 'Once a forum is too big, and you have to start using power point, you will only get the official version...while in the version you can give vocally 'over the table' can say things that you would not dare say on paper,' she argued. It was also pointed out that deliberations has facilitated discussion of not only 'best cases' but also 'worst cases', such as impediments, errors made and lessons learned from them. 'I really think that the 'worst cases' are what is most interesting and valuable in terms of learning', Moseid (2005) stressed.

Both Myrmel – Johansen (2005) and Moseid (2005) emphasised the need to close some forums for NGO participation in order to enable honest and open deliberations. As Myrmel – Johansen (2005) argued, 'we want NGOs to participate, because they raise lots of interesting issues and perspectives. But if we are discussing sensitive subjects such as corruption [...] in my experience, closed forums make that easier...'

Thus the results demonstrate that local networks seem to be highly attended, and that their meetings promote smaller group, face-to-face, multi-stakeholder deliberations. The data indicate that local network meetings have generated considerable learning in the form of information attainment, learning about different views, interests and preferences, reflection, integration and cooperation. It can therefore be asserted that local network meetings may serve the purpose of promoting CR norm internalisations and re-evaluations of pre established interests and perceptions, as participants engage in collaborative dialogue. Learning furthermore appears to have been enabled by the length, intimacy and openness that characterised deliberations, which has led to sensitive issues and problems surfacing.

6 ANALYSIS

This section examines the case study findings within the context of the theoretical framework. First, the data is reviewed with reference to the definition of learning provided, and its operational components as presented in 3.1. To recap, these are 1) the acquirement of new information and knowledge related to CR norms and principles, and furthermore to implementation matters and their possible consequences and solutions; 2) learning about and being able to take on the subjective impressions, values and preferences of others; 3) to reflect about personal interests and integrate new knowledge into one's own opinion in the light of new information and perspectives, and 4) learning how to cooperate with others in solving collective problems. Furthermore types of learning generated through the GC will be emphasised. Subsequently the paper uses the case study data in evaluating how processes of Corporate Responsibility norms have been diffused and internalised by actors in the course of learning through the GC. Here, the relationship between social logics, institutional design and learning processes will be investigated, and the characteristics of the learning arrangements will be appraised within the context of the 2 typologies for learning: the 'rationalist' and 'discursive' models.

6.1 Learning generated through the UN Global Compact

The results demonstrate how the different learning arrangements vary in terms of satisfying the components of learning defined. While the on-line learning arrangement has been weak in satisfying none of the components, the learning forum conferences similarly appear feeble in barely satisfying component 1), while proving insufficient relative to the remaining components. Policy dialogues on the other hand, while keeping in mind the limited generaliseability of this data, seem to have invoked 1), 2) and 3) of the components, or at least bear the potential to do so. In the case of local network meetings, they appear to have invoked considerable learning by means of satisfying all the 4 components of the definition. What is noteworthy, which will be discussed in more detail in the following, is that 'deliberation' appears to be the variable that has generated processes of learning and norm diffusion through satisfying especially component 2) and 3).

The results also exhibit how different types of learning have been generated through the GC engagement mechanisms. First, individual learning seems to have taken place through a face-to-face interaction. The GC network furthermore appears to have brought into effect *inter-organisational learning*. As the results show, dialogue and deliberation seems to have stimulated learning between participants *across policy coalitions*, i.e. in multi-stakeholder forums amid NGOs, businesses and other civil society actors. In addition, the data point towards network learning at the Nordic level. Several of the interviewees expressed that the GCNN group was about to establish a form of group cohesion and solidarity, leading to integrated thinking and cooperation on how to solve common problems and challenges related to CR. It is beyond the scope of this paper

however, to assert more specifically network learning as this would require much more detailed data-gathering, particularly for higher levels of interaction.

6.2 Learning and CR Norm Diffusion – a rational or discursive process?

6.2.1 A rationalist approach

The paper has established that, at a minimum, the learning forum is expected to invoke learning in terms of disseminating corporate responsibility (CR) norms, practices and solutions related to implementation of the 10 principles through best practice cases publications. These expectations seem to correspond largely to a rationalist approach and methodology for learning, such as information and ‘best practice’ dissemination programmes (see Bulkeley, 2004), and its underlying assumptions concerning agents interests and capacities in terms of responding to new information and publications.

The previous section argued that the on-line best practice dissemination strategy has been largely unsuccessful in terms of promoting learning, indicated by its rare use and low attention given to it by participating companies. Indeed, actors do not respond automatically to new information made available to them.

On the one hand, participants might have used the on-line learning forum more extensively if the quality of the submissions were improved. Several of the interviewees claimed that they read other companies’ sustainability reports, in order to observe different ways of approaching and solving CR related issues; but that they deemed the reports and cases offered through the GC as inadequate in terms of quality and therefore learning possibilities (Moseid, 2005; Myrmel – Johansen, 2005). Thus it may be argued that the foundations needed for such a rationalist learning methodology to function as designed, may be absent. If CR norm diffusion and learning related to implementing the principles are to be accomplished by means of on-line information sharing, the engagement mechanism itself needs to be further developed. This might involve, for example, tightening demands on the quality of case studies and CoPs by i) making submissions of CoPs and case studies obligatory for participants, and ii) establishing clear criteria for the layout and content of CoPs and case studies. It is indeed possible that such quality-control and accountability measures could enhance the potential for learning.

While some of these measures would certainly strengthen the GC in terms of transparency and accountability, it is nonetheless doubtful whether this would bring about learning as defined here; involving normative change and actors re-evaluating their (and their company’s) previously established preferences and interests. Indisputably, business actors are in part utility-maximisers which exist first and foremost for the purpose of making profit (Friedman, 1993). They have, therefore, clear economic concerns, which most probably serve as the primary guiding rationale for their social action. It is questionable whether embedded economic interests, which may exist- or at least be perceived as existing- in a win-lose relationship with social and environmental interests, can be challenged through on-line information and best practice sharing, with the effect that companies re-assess or change their approach to social and environmental issues.

Furthermore the assumptions upon which such a rationalist strategy for learning is based may be questioned in the first place. The postulation that actors are perfectly

rational and acting in accordance with logic of consequentialism (March and Olsen, 1989; Risse, 2000; Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998), is problematic indeed. Rather, issues of 'bounded rationality' (Simon, 1957) clearly interfere with the processes by which individuals and organisations acquire new knowledge. Rationality – referring here to the process of seeking 'better' methodologies for solving new and complex problems – may be bounded by human features such as limited capacities for attention and memory; the tendency for human beings to act in conjunction with personal and organisational habits and routines; and the inclination for humans to be influenced by psychological, cultural and institutional environments. The latter in particular often carry deeply embedded practices that produce 'path dependencies' (Simon, 1957; Lindblom, 1990; Kørnøv and Thissen, 2000; Gouldson and Murphy, 1998). In effect, the ability of actors to take into consideration new information available to them may be constrained and inhibited.

The findings demonstrate how issues of bounded rationality as such may limit best - practice dissemination strategies from realising its potential to invoke normative influence through learning processes. As Sampson (2005) argued, business men and women have busy schedules, operating under time constraints while dealing with complex and parallel decision-making, which confine the time available to them to 'go surfing' for best practice cases (Samson, 2005; Morgan, 2005). Indeed, both the case studies and the CoPs made available to the participants for study seem to have attracted inadequate attention (Morgan, 2005; Moseid, 2005; Myrmel – Johansen, 2005; Kopstad, 2005; Sampson, 2005) The evidence thus illustrates how actors are only partly rational-utility maximisers, and that the potential for improvements of the rationalist strategy is limited.

6.2.2 The discursive approach

While the official GC expectations towards the learning-forum conferences, policy dialogues and local networks remain somewhat under-communicated, it seems that they nonetheless anticipate a dispersal of CR norms and principles, not only by means of information and best-practice dissemination, but through *dialogue and discourse*. As the results show, policy dialogues and local network meetings appear, to a significant degree, to have invoked learning and a CR promoting discourse by means of communication and deliberation. It is thus clear that these engagement mechanisms correspond largely to a discursive model for learning as outlined introductory.

The data to a considerable extent affirm the assumptions underlying the discursive model, concerning the relationship between learning and norm diffusion, the 'logic of arguing' and a deliberative forum design. All the interviewees claimed that it was the deliberations that followed 'best practice' cases presentations, which enabled a move beyond success stories to discuss more critical and sensitive issues. This had the effect of making them reflect upon normative pronouncements, and thereby to reassess their own position, policies and conduct related to CR. The GCNN group deliberation on the anti-corruption principle at the last meeting, illustrate this case. According to the interviewees, the norm is still perceived as highly sensitive in that breaches to it is still relatively common. In the course of deliberating on the anti-corruption principle, the GCNN group participants challenged bad practice (the Danish example) and discussed various ways in which corruption can be dealt with and mitigated.

The findings suggests, contrary to the rational-choice assumption that actors interests are relatively fixed during the course of interaction, that actors preferences may be subject to discursive challenge. According to the interviewees, acquaintance with alternative norms, views, means and solutions through deliberations, did lead them to reconsider established policies and practices, and to reflect upon their appropriate roles and responsibilities with respect to social and environmental issues. It appears that a deliberative design of learning forums has catalyzed processes in which actors adhere to the 'logic of appropriateness' and the 'logic of arguing' respectively. Furthermore, these appear to be correlated. While a logic of arguing emerges as actors discuss different interpretations of CR norms and their implementation, such 'arguing' in addition seems to cause behaviour that corresponds also to the logic of appropriateness. Actors seem, in the course of deliberating and arguing, to reflect upon different viewpoints made, with the result that they internalise new perceptions of their own role; not simply for instrumental reasons, but because they understand this to be appropriate. It thus appears to be the case that actors have been driven as much by a 'normative rationality' as an instrumental rationality, because the learning detected cannot be attributed to any regulatory power beyond the sway of the argument and the idea in itself. In other words, the analysis clearly indicates that ideas, norms and normative prescriptions that emerge in the context of communicative interaction have a constitutive effect upon participants in the discourse.

6.3 The UN Global Compact – Governance through learning?

The analysis of the UN GC provides insights to how institutions shape patterns of individual interactions that produce social phenomena, and to the ways in which institutional design can affect social change in specific ways (See March and Olsen, 1989; Hajer and Wagenaar, 2003). This paper asked the question of whether the UN GCs efforts to steer business policy and behaviour with respect to Corporate Responsibility – through the 'learning approach' – has produced any significant changes regarding the ways in which participants formulate their roles and responsibilities as social and environmental agents. To what extent has the 'governance through learning' model hitherto presented a constructive approach to inducing change towards enhanced CR?

A noted, the engagement mechanism which employ a rational learning model, i.e. the on-line learning forum and COP policy practice, has failed to produce any significant learning. This is a significant finding which adds to the assertion that the learning approach at least in part has failed as a constructive tool for catalyzing change in business. Yet, the engagement mechanisms corresponding largely to a discursive learning model appear on the other hand to have generated significant learning between participants, in particular through local networks and at the Nordic level. This suggests that dismissing the potential of the learning approach to invoke changes in corporate policy altogether is mistaken.

Based on these case study results, a number of propositions can be put forward. First, regarding the ways in which social processes of learning come about within institutional context, the study demonstrates that learning should not be understood simply as a rational process by which actors seek new information to pursue or solve pertinent issues or problems more effectively, but rather as discursive developments which result from actors being faced with challenging normative pronouncements through face-to-face

deliberation and collaborative dialogue. Second, GC participants' intentions cannot merely be interpreted along the lines of the interests of *homo-economicus*, or following plainly the 'logic of consequentialism'. Contrary to the popular assumption that business actors are concerned first and foremost with maximizing self-interests (profit and company reputation), this paper found evidence of GC participants being genuinely committed to implementing their company's social and environmental role and responsibility. The results demonstrate that much of what is done in the CR field should be explained with reference to the influences of normative expectations. Actors follow a 'logic of appropriateness' in taking on policies and strategies of CR, because they find this action to be legitimate and appropriate. Finally, the 'logic of arguing' indeed plays a central role in processes of posing effective challenge to established business practices. This paper asserts that arguing and deliberation increases the likelihood of actors reflecting upon and internalising normative commands.

However, it is arguable that the interviewees consulted in this study are perhaps more strongly committed to advancing their company's social and environmental performance than the remainder of the firm. Furthermore, while this study has demonstrated constructive learning in several GC forums, this does not necessarily imply that policy advancements will 'trickle down' in each individual company. How successfully social and environmental policies (or the GC principles) are implemented in practice is a contentious issue which needs further empirical enquiry. A study of policy implementation however is beyond the scope of this particular study. Nevertheless, this paper argues that processes of social construction of corporate citizenship is a fundamental and essential step on the way towards a new state of affairs in which corporations play an increasingly political role, taking on direct responsibilities beyond those of making profit.

The insights concerning the relationship between learning processes and institutional design have major implications for the GC learning approach. First, the GC should recognise the inherent limits to the rational learning approach in the form of written best practice case studies and COPs. Companies don't find it rational to pursue this information, or they don't have the capacity to do so. If both these mechanisms are to succeed in terms of promoting learning or accountability (COPs), they need to be significantly strengthened with more stringent quality and control. In particular further development of the COP policy and practice is imperative to advancing the formal governance capacity of the UN GC. Indeed it may be argued that a more attractive governance model for the GC would rely upon a combination of learning and regulatory mechanisms. However, in terms of strengthening the learning approach, the UN GC needs to employ more explicitly discursive models for learning. This study has demonstrated that it is through deliberation and collaborative dialogue that processes of learning are put into effect. Thus the GC should adopt a clearer strategy of institutional design which utilizes face-to-face deliberation. This proposition is in line with the work of other scholars who have called for an argumentative or discursive turn in policy practice and analysis (see Fischer and Forrester, 1993; Hajer and Wagenaar, 2003; Rydin, 2003).

This study shows that while the popular criticism posed to the UN GC, focusing on the lack of formal governance instruments and effective systems of monitoring and sanctioning cannot be altogether refuted, such critiques (Bendell, 2004; Amnesty, 2003; Corporate Watch, 2002) are perhaps too strongly put; neglecting the de-facto role that

learning and normative influences can have on business actors within governance networks. This study acknowledges that stronger accountability mechanisms would indeed provide added measurable effects in terms of companies implementing the 10 GC principles; however in the absence of political will to regulate companies more stringently, voluntary initiatives that utilize processes of learning and norms entrepreneurship – building their design around these concepts – can have the positive effect of building awareness and contributing to the social construction of corporate citizenship, by challenging what actors recognize as legitimate and appropriate business responses to public demands for corporate responsibility.

7 CONCLUSION

It has been the aim of this paper to provide insights to processes of international governance in the field of Corporate Responsibility. To date, institutions for CR often lack formal and regulatory mechanisms to induce change in corporate policy and practice. This study has been concerned with how and to what extent *informal* governance mechanisms such as learning and norms entrepreneurship can generate changes regarding how business actors recognize and approach their social and environmental responsibilities as global citizens. To this end, the paper has appraised the largest and most ambitious institution of this kind; the UN Global Compact. Using documentary data and in-depth interviews of management personal in British and Norwegian firms, the study has demonstrated how the UN GC's governance model defined as the "learning approach"; diverge in terms of successfully invoking processes of learning between participants. While the paper has established that the rationalist approach employed through schemes of best practice dissemination has failed to produce any significant learning, the approach corresponding to a discursive learning approach has produced some desirable results within the target group. Building on these results the paper alleges that in the context of governance through the UN GC, learning should not be understood as a rational- but a discursive process enabled through a deliberative forums and the 'logic of arguing'. In the course of learning as such, actors appear to have gained new information about CR related issues and problems, and to have reflected upon new norms, principles and ideas. The study has thus illustrated how governance is not simply about formal rules but normative influences generated in informal settings through arguing and deliberation. The paper argues that while popular criticisms posed to the UN GC regarding measures of accountability and transparency are not misplaced (see Corporate Watch, 2002; Amnesty, 2003; Bendell, 2004), they nevertheless neglect the de-facto role that learning and normative influences can play in governance networks; in terms of building awareness, catalyzing changes in companies CR policy, and invoking processes of social construction of corporate identities as social and environmental agents. This provides a constructive dimension of GC engagement often disregarded by its critics. Yet, much remains to be done in order to strengthen the GC learning approach. In essence, the GC should reconsider its governance through learning model along the recommendations of this study. This involves in particular a reassessment of the on-line learning forum and COP policy, which to date has failed to deliver its desired objectives. Finally, a discursive model for learning and a deliberative forum design should be utilized more explicitly and strategically by the GC Office, to reinforce its learning approach moving into a more mature phase.

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