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GOOGLE'S RESTRICTED CHINESE SEARCH ENGINE: MANAGING CONTRADICTORY PRESSURES TO MAINTAIN INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTH

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Abstract: Traditional institutional theories have been instrumental in understanding how institutions shape the behavior of organizations, yet they often fall short in comprehensively capturing organizational agency. This study addresses this gap by proposing a novel perspective that centers on the strategic management of dialectical tensions within the institutional environment as a form of institutional work.

Drawing from the concept of discursive institutional work, this study introduces a dialectical model that emphasizes the dynamic interplay between institutions and organizations. Institutions frequently rely on discourses that are inherently ambiguous and rife with contradictions, fostering multiple interpretations. In response, organizations leverage these contradictions within institutional discourse to reframe dialectical tensions. This reframing enables organizations to assert strategic positioning in the face of ambiguity within the institutional environment, ultimately leading to adaptive changes in the organization itself.

By examining how organizations navigate and harness dialectical tensions within institutional discourse, this research offers fresh insights into the complex interplay between institutions and organizational agency. This perspective sheds light on how organizations can actively shape their roles and trajectories within the multifaceted landscape of institutional environments.

Keywords: Traditional institutional theories, organizational agency, dialectical tensions, discursive institutional work, institutional discourse.

Introduction

Traditional institutional theories are valuable for explaining how institutions enable and constrain the practices of individual organizations; however, they do not fully account for organizational agency (DiMaggio, 1988; Suddaby, 2011). In particular, existing studies neglect the agency of these organizations to manage the institutional environment for their advantage.

This study argues that organizations can strategically position themselves by managing dialectical tensions in the institutional environment as a process of institutional work. A dialectical model of discursive institutional work is thus proposed. First, institutions draw upon discourses that are ambiguous and contradictory (Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2004) and, consequently, subject to multiple interpretations. By exploiting the contradictions embedded in institutional discourse, organizations can reframe dialectical tensions at play within, thereby managing their position in an ambiguous institutional environment. Therefore, the organization changes as it adapts to its hybrid institutional environment.

The proposed model is illustrated through a discussion of the institution of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and a case study that examines Google's discursive journey in establishing and maintaining its China-based search

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engine, Google.cn. Google positions itself as an ethical company and is known for the motto, "Don't be evil"; however, the company has been harshly criticized for its search engine, www.google.cn, which is censored per Chinese law. This article examines how Google responded to its institutional environment by exploiting the equivocality embedded in current discourses related to CSR. More specifically, it explicates how Google framed and reframed the dialectical tensions to handle pressures from different stakeholders. Google attempted to redefine corporate social responsibility in terms of information access, transparency, freedom of speech, and transparency and presented these as new additions to the discussion of CSR; in doing so, Google envisioned the relationship between society, Internet companies, and Internet freedom. However, while Google's efforts appeared on the surface as calls to change the institution of CSR, the company's discourse instead served to maintain the institution by reinforcing the classic discourses of CSR. Thus, Google's institutional work constituted an adaptation to the institutional environment rather than an institutional change.

From a theoretical standpoint, the model extends the institutional work literature by envisioning instances in which activities that appear to oppose an institution may actually serve to maintain and even strengthen it. Furthermore, this case is important from a practical standpoint to organizations, their leaders, and communication specialists who find themselves caught in multiple institutional environments simultaneously and must, for purposes of legitimacy and stakeholder relations, satisfactorily manage the conflicting norms of each.

Literature Review

Organizational Agency and Institutional Work

Institutions are a set of rules, norms, or structures that shape the behaviors of individuals and organizations (Scott, 2008). According to Phillips, Lawrence, and Hardy (2004), institutions are constructed "primarily through the production of texts, rather than directly through actions" (p. 638). Furthermore, institutions are discursively constructed in that they are often built upon existing discourses that are generally accepted as true in a society.

Neoinstitutionalism theory focuses on how organizations are pressured to adopt certain practices due to the constraints of the institution rather than purely out of economic concerns. It conceptualizes organizations as passive and automatic responders to the institutional conditions. More recently, institutional work theory has started to treat organizations as more powerful agents with the capacity to create and change institutions (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). As such, the focus is on the notion of work, which comprises the everyday activities of actors that affect institutions either successfully or unsuccessfully (Lawrence, Suddaby, & Leca, 2011). Such work can be done discursively.

According to the theory of institutional work, organizations can exert their agency by creating new institutions or disrupting existing ones (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Both of these types of institutional work result in changes. Organizations can mobilize political and regulatory mechanisms, creating rules and defining and redefining the relationship between individual actors and the environment to create new institutions or add new elements to an existing institution. Alternatively, they can disrupt an institution by redefining the rewards and sanctions associated with certain practices, dissociating the moral foundations of practices and rules of an institution, or undermining the core assumptions of the institution. Although institutional work is typically associated with bringing changes to organizations, Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) pointed out that maintaining the institution represents another kind of institutional work. Individual organizations can maintain the institution by creating rules that facilitate or supplement the existing institution, policing organizations in following the rules of the institution, creating coercive mechanisms to prevent institutional change, and creating and sustaining myth about the history of the institution, among others.

Discourse is at the center of institutional work. Discourse in this sense goes beyond mere dialogue or written communication and constitutes a collection of related texts that actually cause something to occur or be created (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) argued that institutional work is often "language-centered" (p. 239) and suggested that researchers should examine discursive institutional work by studying the

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rhetoric, narrative, and dialogues of actors. In this article, we examine the institutional work of Google in relation to the institution of corporate social responsibility.

The Institution of Corporate Social Responsibility

Despite the debate on what constitutes corporate social responsibility, researchers and managers alike generally agree that corporations need to operate with an eye on the social and environmental consequences of their business pursuits. In the 1970s and 1980s, Carroll's (1979) pyramid of social responsibility emphasized different levels of ethical concern for organizations, which were presumed to build on one another, like a hierarchy. At the bottom were economic goals: maximizing profits and minimizing losses. The legal level constituted adherence to local, state, and national laws and regulatory policy (Carroll, 1979). The next level focused on the ethical responsibility to stakeholders and society to produce goods and services that did not cause harm through fair and just means. Since the 1990s, the idea of corporate citizenship has been gaining momentum. This period witnessed the unprecedented expansion of multinational corporations, which amassed enormous resources and influence, while traditional welfare governments have increasingly become powerless in dealing with many social problems, such as pollution. Hence, multinational corporations have begun to play a more active role as stewards of society (Birch, 2001). During the same time, the stakeholder theory of CSR also has become quite prominent. Stakeholders are those groups or individuals who can exert influence or be influenced by corporations. Clarkson (1995) applied the concept of stakeholders to the study of CSR and argued that corporations should base their treatment of different stakeholders on the relative importance of each. More recently, communication scholars have proposed a critical approach to CSR research. They focus on how the concept of CSR has been constructed in its specific social, economic, cultural, and political contexts (May, 2011). They treat CSR as a set of discourses that are political in nature and ask questions regarding what CSR is, who has the power to define CSR, what are the values on which CSR is based, and whose values those are (Kuhn & Deetz, 2008).

Researchers have debated whether corporate social responsibility is an institution. Some argue that CSR is no more than a set of discrete and at times conflicting assumptions, principles, and behavior norms. For instance, CSR can be understood as a paradox between voluntary and state-sanctioned behaviors (Dunfee, 2009). CSR could be driven by a business case (i.e., companies' self-interest) or a normative case (i.e., a selfless desire to do good) (Morsing, Midttun, & Palmas, 2007). The underlying assumption of CSR could be liberalism or stakeholder governance (Fransen, 2012). CSR is also specific to different national contexts and levels of economic development (Kang & Moon, 2012).

On the other hand, CSR fits the definition of institution based on the theories of neoinstitutionalism, despite incoherence and ambiguities. Companies' engagement in CSR can be attributed to institutional pressures, including state regulatory forces, industries' self-regulation, the monitoring of institutional actors such as nongovernmental organizations and the press, a normative environment established through business school education, trade associations that emphasize CSR, and active dialogue among corporations and their stakeholders (Campbell, 2007). Such an institution is present among multinational corporations (Bondy, Moon, & Matten, 2012). In fact, some researchers argue that the inherent contradictions within the institution of CSR provide strategic advantage in uniting the stakeholders and providing them with "a license to critique" (Christensen, Morsing, & Thyssen, 2015).

It is important to acknowledge that "the discourse surrounding an institution need not cohere, either logically or as a narrative" (Barley, 2011, p. 200). Discourses can be seen as "incomplete, ambiguous, and contradictory" (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 1) in the sense that they are based upon broadly accepted yet abstract values such as equality, freedom, fairness, achievement, and the like. Because values are abstract, they are also equivocal in that they can be interpreted or practically implemented in various ways (Barley, 2011). For example, philanthropy is a key value within CSR discourse; however, how philanthropy translates into corporate practice can vary broadly across organizations. Thus, an institutional discourse constitutes a living dialogue that emerges and is reified as

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social reality, yet is also open to metamorphosis as the collective debates over the core values or institutional logics involved. As a result, organizations can exercise their agency to better create and maintain the legitimacy of their practices by exploiting the equivocality within the institution or offering alternative implications for its underlying logics.

As equivocality in institutional discourses allows for unification of viewpoints (Barley, 2011), it stands to reason that dialectical relationships between divergent ideologies are at play. Here dialectics are understood as tensions between opposite values (Stohl & Cheney, 2001)—or, in this case, discourses— which allow the simultaneous pursuit of two goals (McGuire, Dougherty, & Atkinson, 2006). For example, the idea of human rights prevalent in CSR discourse might encompass both, often conflicting, notions as the right to safety and security versus the right to freedom and individual choice. Seo and Creed (2002) identified four dialectical tensions that can emerge from relationships between organizations and institutions: (1) legitimacy versus technical efficiency; (2) adaptation versus adaptability; (3) conformity within the institution versus interinstitutional compatibility; and (4) isomorphism at the expense of uniqueness. Each of these tensions puts the organization at odds with its institutional environment and affects the organization's agency. Studies have yet to address how organizations can use tensions in institutional discourse to strategically position themselves within their institutional environment, particularly in a pluralistic, globalizing institutional environment.

Managing Tensions in a Pluralistic Institutional Environment

Lewis (2000) described a "paradox of learning" that an organization experiences when increasing complexity in the environment results in different streams of knowledge that appear in tension with one another. If organizations engage with the tensions in a self-reflexive way, gradual change can occur for the betterment of the organization. In such pluralistic environments, Van de Ven and Poole (1995) noted that an organization's engagement with dialectical tensions represents organizational change taking place as thesis and antithesis meet and one takes precedence or the two are merged, creating a new organizational reality. Benson's (1977) model of dialectics can be used to understand how organizations respond to tensions in institutional discourse in ways that can benefit them. According to the theory, organizational reality, which is comprised of multiple contradictory components, is constantly being reconstructed through human interaction. Because the dialectical view is fundamentally committed to the concept of process, it is a valuable tool in examining negotiation of tensions among discourses and the creation of new meaning for organizations caught in the crossfire of competing organizational and institutional demands.

Managing contradictions in organizational contexts is a common theme in empirical research. *Selection* involves prioritizing one pole over another (Seo, Putnam, & Bartunek, 2004). *Source splitting* occurs when different organizational members pay attention to different poles (Tracy, 2004). When members engage in *vacillation*, they emphasize different poles in different situations (Tracy, 2004). *Integration* refers to acknowledging the importance of both poles at the same time (Seo et al., 2004). *Withdrawal* is at play when individuals avoid dealing with the tensions altogether (Tracy, 2004). *Transcendence* occurs when the dichotomies are reframed so that the original dialectic is no longer present (Putnam, 1986). Within the organizational change literature, Barge, Lee, Maddux, Nabring, and Townsend (2008) contributed additional strategies through their study of a change initiative. They found that the tensions present during the change were most commonly managed through strategies of connection, which recognize that both poles serve equally to support each other yet still maintain their distinctions. The first of these is *commonplacing*, or noting a common thread between two poles so that value can be seen in each. Second, *bounded mutuality* is used to acknowledge that, while both poles are equal in status, boundaries are adopted for where, when, and how each pole is addressed. Third, *reflexive positioning* involves creating learning opportunities for the relationship between poles to be reconsidered, such as when a new metaphor is applied so that the two poles can be understood in a new way.

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This research suggests that organizations have some ability to control outcomes associated with the contradictions they face. Similarly, we argue that organizations' management of tensions in institutional discourse can serve as a kind of institutional work that in fact transforms the organization. In the current research, we apply Benson's (1977) dialectical framework and Lawrence and Suddaby's (2006) model of institutional work to examine how an organization can discursively exploit the dialectical tensions to adapt to its institutional environment. We investigate how corporations can respond to the institution of CSR by framing and reframing dialectical tensions in competing discourses vis-à-vis an examination of Google's discourse regarding its search engine in China. Google was chosen for the current study as a leading technology firm that must negotiate its role with different stakeholders on ethical issues new to the discussion of CSR, including freedom of speech, censorship, and information access in the global market. Google is clearly not alone in its dilemma between economic goals and humanitarian values. Major global Internet firms, such as Yahoo, Microsoft, and Cisco, have been criticized by stakeholders for submitting to the Chinese government's information control requirements. These corporations have responded to criticism through official blogs, interviews with the media, and formal responses to government inquiries. However, Google's case has received the most attention, and the company has been most vocal regarding societal obligations (Lee, Liu, & Li, 2013). Based on this theoretical discussion, we ask the following research question:

How has Google discursively exploited the dialectical tensions in the institution of corporate social responsibility to its benefit?

A Case Study of Google: Background

On January 27, 2006, Google launched www.google.cn, its China-based search engine, which was censored per the Chinese government's requirements, and politically sensitive terms were unsearchable on this new site. Regardless of disparagements from human rights activists, shareholders, consumers, and the media in the West, Google operated www.google.cn for four years, hoping to earn profits in China's fast-growing Internet market.

However, Google was unable to replicate its success story in China. Google's expansion in China was stopped by its Chinese competitor, Baidu, and Google was able to control only about 25% of the search engine market in China (Madden, 2010). The company was hit hard in 2008 by the financial crisis, and this was the only year in the company's history when its profit stagnated (Fuchs, 2012).

Google took an abrupt turn in its business approach in China when, on January 12, 2010, David Drummond, senior vice president of corporate development, published an entry titled "A New Approach to China" on the company's blog, which announced, "We have decided we are no longer willing to continue censoring our results on Google.cn" (Drummond, 2010a, para. 8) and indicated that Google would exit China if the government did not loosen its Internet censorship and filtering requirements. On March 23, Google announced it would automatically redirect Google.cn visitors to the uncensored www.google.com.hk, a move met with applause from U.S. stakeholders (Drummond, 2010b). Then, on June 28, Drummond stated that, instead of being automatically redirected, users would enter a landing page where they would choose between Google.com.hk and using the censored www.google.cn (Drummond, 2010c).

Method

We analyze Google's discursive institutional work reflected in its three testimonies before United States Senate and Congress in 2006, 2008, and 2010. We situated the analysis within the concurrent debate about CSR among the government, corporations, and human rights organizations. These widely circulated testimonies constituted Google's official statements concerning censorship and directly addressed corporations' social responsibilities. Google's executives often referred to the arguments made in these testimonies in public interviews or in the company's blogs. Google's major stakeholders such as human rights organizations and the U.S. government also quoted these documents frequently while either praising or refuting Google's positions. In addition, the testimonies comprised what Phillips and Hardy (2002) described as a "body of texts" (p. 23). They represented

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part of a larger dialogue among technology companies, government, and human rights organizations over what constituted CSR. Analyzing a body of texts was valuable based on Phillips and Hardy's (2002) proposition that "texts that draw on other texts within the discourse and on other well-established discourses are more likely to become embedded in discourse than texts that do not" (p. 644). Furthermore, the choice to examine three texts over a period of six years addressed calls by scholars to examine institutional change using longitudinal data (Barley & Tolbert, 1997).

We approached our analysis as one of "interpretive structuralism," which focuses on "the analysis of the social context and the discourse that supports it" (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 23). This approach relied upon other texts and the surrounding institutional context to explain the "bigger picture" (p. 24). We contextualized Google's discourse within the larger discussion of Internet censorship and the role of U.S. corporations in promoting human rights around the world.

We began by analyzing the data using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), closely reading the three testimonies to identify discourses or values related to CSR.[1] During this initial step, we discovered that the discourses seemed to compete with one another and we began to identify dialectical tensions at play. When we noted prominent words and phrases that depicted oppositional values or logics, such as "don't be evil," we created dialectical categories based on these themes of contradiction. Through a process of constant comparison (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), we were able to condense repetitive dialectics, thus creating broad dialectical categories under which secondary dialectics were placed. In the end, we identified three primary dialectical tensions in Google's discourse: the dialectic of business versus ethics, the dialectic of global standards versus local compliance, and the dialectic of corporate control versus state control. We also compared the three testimonies to examine how Google discursively managed these tensions over time through changing language choices. In the next section, we explain how these tensions emerged, the ways in which Google managed the tensions across the three testimonies, and how changing treatment of the dialectics represented attempts at institutional change.

Results

Phillips and Hardy (2002) argued that, when conducting discourse analysis, researchers should situate the discourse within the broader context. The discursive context of Google's institutional work included two parts: the discourse of CSR and the discourse of Internet freedom. The discourse of CSR recognized a hierarchical relationship among corporations' economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary responsibilities (Carroll, 1979). In other words, corporations should fulfill economic and legal responsibilities before their loftier discretionary responsibilities. The discourse of Internet freedom was mainly created by human rights organizations. In the context of Internet freedom in China, Human Rights Watch published its first report on the subject titled, "Freedom of Expression in China" in 2000. Amnesty International published two reports in 2002 and 2004, which advocated for U.S.-based companies to adhere to U.S. laws and international treaties and promote freedom of speech and human rights in China by forming alliances between themselves and the U.S. government to put pressure on the Chinese government. However, large technology companies used the discourse of market capitalism to justify their adherence to Chinese laws and the government's demand for information disclosure and censorship in their pursuit of profit. It was within this discursive context that Google started its institutional work to reframe[2] dialectical relationships in the institution of CSR.

Business versus Ethics

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[1] In a sense, these values or discourses are similar to institutional logics, which were defined as a set of symbolic constructions and material practices that serve as the cultural and material foundations of an institution (Friedland & Alford, 1987).

[2] We use the term *reframe* to constitute any instance in which Google restructured a dialectical tension through its discourse.

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First, Google's statements all centered on the dialectical tension of economic responsibility versus ethical responsibility. Google appealed to the discourse of business by positioning itself as a business corporation competing in a free market for maximum profit. At the beginning of its 2006 testimony, Google acknowledged: There is no question that, as a matter of business, we want to be active in China. It is a huge, rapidly growing, and enormously important market, and our key competitors are already there. It would be disingenuous to say that we don't care about that because, of course, we do. We are a business with stockholders, and we want to prosper and grow in a highly competitive world. (Schrage, 2006, para. 28)

Several concepts related to the discourse of business were prominent in Google's early discourse, including market, competition, and laws and regulations. *Market* was a concept central to Google's discourse about itself as a business. For example, in justifying its decision to comply with the Chinese government's requirement for self-censorship, Google highlighted the exponential growth of the Internet market in China and noted that it was imperative for Google to capture its potential and earn profits for its shareholders. *Competition* was another concept that frequently appeared in Google's discourse. Google emphasized its need to battle local competitors. Baidu, Inc., Google's leading local competitor and the most popular search engine in China, was repeatedly mentioned. Competition from local search engines constituted the primary reason that Google agreed to the Chinese government's censorship requirement. Besides market and competition, *laws and regulations* comprised a third concept central to Google's discussion of business practices. Google justified its self-censorship by appealing to local laws and regulations that required companies to filter information.

In addition to the discourse of business, Google acknowledged the company's ethical responsibilities in its testimonies. Google recognized its decision to censor the search results on www.google.cn as constituting the primary controversy surrounding its ethical practices. Responding to critics, especially human rights organizations and the U.S. government, Google emphasized that it was a company of values and ethics. The most prominent ethical issue Google discussed was freedom of expression, which censorship violated.

Google struggled in managing its role as a business and as an ethical company, and its position shifted considerably during the three testimonies. In its 2006 testimony, Google justified its compromise on freedom of speech by adopting the discourse of business; that is, China's growing Internet market represented a business opportunity that Google could not refuse. What was implied here was that the unwavering commitment to freedom of speech would encumber business development. At the center of this dilemma lay the tension between idealism and pragmatism. Instead of sticking to values of human rights and freedom of expression and sacrificing profit, Google was making a decision that was "far from our ideal" (Schrage, 2006, para. 12) based on "very pragmatic calculation" (para. 10), through which "Google.cn will make a meaningful—though imperfect—contribution to the overall expansion of access to information in China" (para. 4).

Google handled the tension of business versus ethics by reframing them as consistent with each other in its 2008 and 2010 testimonies. In its 2008 testimony, Google diluted the contradiction between business and ethics by referring to another pair of dialectics: ethical censorship and unethical censorship ("Global Internet Freedom," 2008). Ethical censorship represented governmental attempts to limit freedom of speech that was apolitical—or, in Google's words, "laudable" (para. 18) and "relatively benign" (para. 23). Such censorship was based on moral, cultural, or historical grounds. Examples of moral censorship were "the fight against child pornography" (para. 18) and censorship against "content that promotes violence against protected groups" (para. 29). Examples of censorship based on cultural, historical, and religious rationales included censorship of any insult to the King in Thailand or attacks on Islam in Indonesia. Unethical censorship, in Google's testimonies, referred solely to political censorship, which Google defined as political censorship as stemming from "authoritarian governments" ("Global Internet Freedom," 2008, para. 13), "repressive regimes" ("Global Internet Freedom," 2010, para. 2), or "military government" ("Global Internet Freedom," 2008, para. 14)" and characterized as "heavy-handed" ("Global Internet Freedom," 2008, para. 23). Recognizing that every country censored its Internet to some extent,

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Google justified its censorship by saying that it assisted ethical censorship and resisted unethical censorship. In creating this new pair of dialectics, Google started to break down the clear-cut contradiction between censoring Internet content and being an ethical company.

Google further rejected the contradiction between business and ethics in its 2010 testimony. According to Google, censorship represented a form of protectionism that favored local over global firms and thus constituted a barrier to the expansion and competitiveness of Internet companies. The company claimed:

Barriers to the free flow of information online have significant and serious economic implications: they impose often one-sided restrictions on the services of U.S. and global Internet companies, while also impeding other businesses who depend on the Internet to reach their customers. ("Global Internet Freedom," 2010, para. 25)

As a result, freedom of speech was no longer just an ethical value that companies like Google wanted to uphold. It became an essential condition for companies to compete fairly in the global market in pursuit of market share and profit.

In short, Google gradually changed its position toward the dialectic of business versus ethics between 2006 and 2010. While originally framing business and ethics as an either/or choice that a company needed to make, Google began to align ethical practices with good business by arguing that unethical practices such as censorship were bad for business as well. In doing so, Google no longer had to make the difficult choice between business and ethics.

Global Standards versus Local Compliance

Another dialectical tension prominent in Google's discourse was that of global standards versus local compliance. Throughout its testimonies, Google continuously referred to its belief in information access, freedom of speech, transparency, and human rights. Google characterized these as universal standards to be upheld and called for governments, corporations, nongovernmental organizations, human rights activists, socially responsible investors, and individuals to promote them globally. On the other hand, Google emphasized the importance of local compliance by constantly referring to "Chinese laws and regulations" (e.g., Schrage, 2006, para. 3), "new laws and other restrictions on our services" (para. 16), and "China's laws, regulations, and policies against illegal information" (para. 22) as barriers to the universal application of its global ethical standards.

Initially, Google framed censorship as a local problem and emphasized localized solutions over global ethical standards. In its 2006 testimony, Google referred to local compliance as one of its three fundamental commitments, stating:

Some governments impose restrictions that make our mission difficult to achieve, and this is what we have encountered in China. In such a situation, we have to add to the balance a third fundamental commitment: Be **responsive** to local conditions. (Schrage, 2006, para. 10)

The benefits of local compliance were repeatedly mentioned, and these included higher reliability of service and higher speed. Google described its localization practices as a "contribution to the overall expansion of access to information in China" (Schrage, 2006, para. 4).

Google's discourse began to change significantly in its 2008 testimony, which envisioned Internet censorship as a global problem caused by local standards and an issue that called for global solutions at the institutional level. Google referred to the challenges it faced as "a broad range of global censorship efforts" ("Global Internet Freedom," 2008, para. 29). The company discussed censorship in a number of countries: China, Iran, North Korea, Zimbabwe, and Myanmar. Instead of discussing itself as a part of the problem, Google claimed to be part of the solution and highlighted how its products such as Blogger (a blogging service) and Groups (an online bulletin board) had been used as "platforms for free expression" (para. 40) in countries such as Venezuela and Myanmar. In Google's discourse, two solutions were necessary: global standards for companies and global standards for governments. Google called for international collaboration to establish global standards in dealing with Internet

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censorship for global corporations. At the same time, Google tried to establish standards for governments of all countries in addressing Internet use. Such standards were to be based on the universal values emphasized throughout Google's testimonies: human rights, freedom of expression, and information access. Google cited international treaties such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, both adopted by the United Nations as examples of such global standards in governmental practices*.

Google's discourse demonstrated a further emphasis on the global in its 2010 testimony. It pointed out, "The number of governments that routinely censor the Internet has grown from a handful in 2002 to more than 40 countries today" ("Global Internet Freedom," 2010, para. 2). Furthermore, Google called for global solutions to the problem of Internet censorship. While in its early testimonies, Google responded passively to the concerns and inquiries of the U.S. government, it also presented itself as a global leader of ethical practices and requested the collaboration of the U.S. government in creating a global solution based on global ethical standards. It urged the U.S. government to make "the issue of Internet openness, including the free flow of information, an important part of foreign policy, trade, and development and human rights engagement" (para. 27).

In discussing the dialectic of global standards versus local compliance, Google's position changed over time. In its 2006 testimony, the company emphasized the discourse of localization by frequently mentioning terms such as "local conditions" (Schrage, 2006, para. 10), "local laws and regulations" (para. 43), "local competitors" (para. 21), and "product for China" (para. 4). Google discussed localization favorably in terms of its move to "be respectful" of local laws and regulations. Furthermore, Google explained how it had adapted its products and services to local social, cultural, historical, and religious conditions to better serve local users and make the company more viable in these markets. However, Google's 2008 and 2010 documents de-emphasized localization while highlighting the importance of establishing global standards for Internet freedom. Global standards upholding universal values such as human rights and freedom of expression were especially prominent in the later testimonies.

Corporate Control Versus State Control

The dialectic of corporate control versus state control was concerned with whether Google risked the Chinese government blocking access to its services by maintaining its commitment not to censor search results or whether the company censored itself so that it could maintain control over the quality and reliability of its global monopoly position. In comparing the depiction of this dialectic across the three testimonies, Google shifted from discussing control in terms of the service it provided to assuming control of the institutional environment from which it derived its decisions about its role in human rights advocacy.

In the 2006 testimony, Google expressed a preference for in-house control over its operations as the ethical standard and state control of its operations as unethical. Google began this account by explaining its original choice, which was to provide the same service to China as to the rest of the world— a service that was unfiltered for several years. The company stated, "We faced a choice at that point: hold fast to our commitment to free speech . . . or compromise our principles by entering the Chinese market directly and subjecting ourselves to Chinese laws and regulations" (Schrage, 2006, para. 5). Here, corporate control required a commitment to free speech, and state control occurred when Google allowed the Chinese government's censorship laws to direct its business. This perspective on control shifted, however, when the testimony started to address some reliability problems in its service that were beyond the company's control: "The cause of the slowness and unreliability appears to be, in large measure, the extensive filtering performed by China's licensed Internet Service Providers" (para. 22). Here, Google linked problems in its service to the lack of control the company experienced when it chose not to work with the Chinese government, thus subjecting its services to sabotage. Through most of the 2006 testimony, Google associated corporate control with proactive behaviors such as disclosure of filtering, transparency about service availability, and the protection of user privacy. Thus, Google shifted from emphasizing

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censorship as caused by the Chinese government's control of its Internet service to the company's own efforts to control communication about censorship with Chinese users. By justifying its actions in this way, Google was able to legitimize providing a reliable, yet filtered, service to Chinese users.

In the 2008 testimony, Google discussed ways in which the company had emerged as an industry leader in setting standards for ethics discussed in the 2006 testimony. Above all, Google expressed a commitment to freedom of expression and uncensored access to information through its products. In doing so, Google implied that the company had an ethical responsibility to ensure that its products were platforms for free information exchange. Google supported this vision by noting various instances in which the company took responsibility for upholding ethical standards in its services. For example, Google referenced three steps it took toward enhancing transparency on its Google.cn site: (1) presenting "clear notification on the results page to users" ("Global Internet Freedom," 2008, para. 45) when a particular search elicited censored results; (2) allowing users to see when a site they are trying to see is blocked; and (3) displaying a link to the unfiltered Google.com.

In this testimony, Google stressed the importance of having in-house control of its Internet services. Google also began to assert authority in defining who should advocate for freedom of speech: "We believe that governments around the world can and must do more to effectively reduce Internet censorship and promote free expression online" ("Global Internet Freedom," 2008, para. 8). Google began to redefine corporate control in terms of human rights advocacy through statements such as, "Our products are often used as free expression tools in countries that restrict speech through other media" (para. 11) and "Because of this, we often face efforts by governments throughout the world to restrict or deny access to our products" (para. 15). Google charged that governments had blocked its attempts to promote freedom of speech around the world: "It is clear that many governments impose legal or practical limits on their citizens' freedom of speech" (para. 18). This statement reflected a new institutional authority in which corporate actors encouraged governments to adhere to certain values rather than the reverse.

Also present in the 2008 testimony was a call for change at the level of government. Rather than defending its choices as it did in 2006, Google delved into the difficulties governments created for corporations that sought to promote human rights in their services. Thus, the 2008 testimony indicated a further move by Google toward adherence to the pole of corporate control as it told governments how they could better enable companies to engage in ethical practices as well as have more control over the services they offered.

The central message in the 2010 testimony presented a stark contrast to that of the 2006 hearing. By 2010, Google's statements reflected a sense of institutional authority from which other corporations and governments should model their approach to Internet censorship. Google's representative opened by stating, "I am part of the Google team that works to promote free speech both in the U.S. and globally" ("Global Internet Freedom," 2010, para. 1). This claim identified Google as a company whose job it was to create and endorse an institutional environment in which corporations advance human rights globally. It referenced several attempts by China's government to limit its Internet service to customers and, in doing so, focused on the pole of state control.

However, these mentions constituted a relatively small percentage of the overall message in the 2010 testimony. In contrast to the previous testimonies, the 2010 testimony primarily focused on addressing ways that governments could advocate for human rights globally. Google restated the three foundations on which its business rested—access, transparency, and remaining trustworthy with online users—but discussed the ways in which they were shared: "These principles are not exclusive to Google, and there are ways that the public and private sectors can work together to advance them" (para. 22). This time, the testimony presented Google as the pacesetter and other companies—and, in particular, governments—as entities that Google took responsibility for influencing. Google described how governments could better fit these institutional standards on ethics by highlighting the company's own actions regarding censorship, which reflected a move toward praxis as envisioned by Seo and Creed (2002). Google now characterized exerting control over the institutional

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environment as maintaining control from within. Using a proactive approach, Google urged governments to take several steps to promote freedom of information access, privacy, and expression. First, it stated:

Governments need to develop a full set of new trade rules to address new trade barriers. We encourage further efforts along these lines, by the U.S. government and other governments to redress favoritism shown by some governments for indigenous companies over U.S.-based corporations. ("Global Internet Freedom," 2010, para. 20)

This proposal implied that even governments that claimed to favor human rights were preventing corporations from acting according to the highest standards of ethics. By urging governments to direct attention to trade barriers, Google presented itself as a company that was responsible for institutional change that fully supported ethical behavior by corporations.

Furthermore, Google urged governments to be transparent, just as the company itself purported to have done. Google argued that:

Establishing transparency as a norm when governments attempt to censor or request information about users, or even when a company's network comes under attack. This is a critical part of the democratic process, and governments must strike a balance between law enforcement and proper disclosure, allowing citizens to hold their lawmakers accountable. (para. 24)

This quote again established Google as a standard setter and institutional change agent. By listing its ethical accomplishments and principles as a company and then urging governments to follow suit, Google sought to place itself in control of its own services and implied that governments could either facilitate or hinder corporations in their pursuit of upholding ethical standards.

A comparison of the three texts revealed a movement from asserting control at the corporate level (whereby the company controlled the service it provided), to the state level (where Google began to define for governments how they could help other companies maintain better control over their own services), to, finally, the institutional level, at which the company presented itself as the standard to which governments and other corporations should conform, given the hybrid, institutional environment brought about by globalization.

Discussion

Communication researchers have been called upon to develop theories on the communication processes involved in institutional work (Suddaby, 2011). In response, this article proposes a discursive perspective to institutional work in which individual organizations can exploit the ambiguities within existing institutions of corporate social responsibility by reconfiguring the dialectical tensions between pairs of conflicting discourses. This model is illustrated with a case study of Google and its effort in dealing with issues of censorship, Internet freedom, and corporate social responsibility in operating its Chinabased search engine.

The analysis of Google's testimonies reveals a company that responds to the criticism of its practices by institutional actors through the discursive engagement of dialectic tensions of pairs of opposite ideas: the company's role in maximizing profits and its ethical obligations; its need to establish global codes of conduct and the pressure of adhering to local standards; and the choice between maintaining control over its products or relinquishing some degree of control to the local government.

Google initially responded to its critics by conforming to different elements in the existing institutional environment. Allen and Caillouet (1994) noted that "corporate actors use mechanisms and procedures to convey conformity with their institutional environment in order to enhance legitimacy and survival chances" (p. 48). In its 2006 testimony, Google refers to the discourse of business and considers economic responsibility as its primary social responsibility. It treats localization as a legitimate practice of global companies and emphasizes a company's need to maintain control over its own products. Gradually, however, Google's discourse shifts to equate censorship with local protectionism and argues that good business practice requires companies to conform to global ethical standards, which the company is trying to build. To claim conformity with the current

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institutional environment, the company adopts the role of a standard setter, proposes a new institutional standard for other organizations and governments to follow, and discursively demonstrates the ways in which it adheres to its proposed standard.

Over time, Google gradually advocated the following ideas. First, ethics and business cannot be separated, and unethical practices such as censorship ultimately hurt business, which goes back to the early business case of CSR as articulated, for instance, in the idea of the triple bottom line (Elkington, 1997) and the first generation of CSR as outlined in Stohl, Stohl, and Townsley (2007). Although the new institution of CSR envisioned in Google's discourse may appear to be similar to that promoted by human rights organizations, it is fundamentally different from the latter in that it continues to prioritize the discourse of business over the discourse of ethics or human rights. Second, companies should be activists and agenda setters in developing ethical standards and should be active participants in social responsibility, particularly in the realm of human rights. For global companies, this institutional change implies that companies should not lower their ethical standards to meet the minimum requirements of the local society and thus end up in a "race to the bottom" in their respective process of global expansions. Instead, they should take the lead in seeking support from their home governments to change local standards and promote global values such as freedom of expression. This resonates with the idea that corporations should be the stewards of society as explicated in the theory of corporate citizenship (Birch, 2001). Finally, a demand of increasing governmental intervention not only echoed the second generation of CSR but was consistent with the current trend of increasing state involvement in the promotion of CSR (Albareda, Lozano, Tencati, Midttun, & Perrini, 2008).

Initially, many important stakeholders enthusiastically applauded Google's discourse and decision to stop censoring its China-based search engine. On January 21, 2010, Hillary Clinton, the U.S. secretary of state at the time, gave a speech on Internet freedom in which she reinforced Google's rhetoric that it was the ethical responsibility of U.S. businesses to combat governmental censorship globally (Clinton, 2010). Similarly, Human Rights Watch (2010), one of the most visible critics of Google in the past, praised Google for its decision and called on other technology firms to follow suit). Right after Google's exit, GoDaddy.com, another U.S.-based Internet company, also pulled out of China. However, the anticipated exodus of global technology companies from China did not happen. One year later, in an attempt to fill the vacuum left by Google, Microsoft Bing struck a deal with Baidu to power its English-language searches, which were promptly censored. Such development suggested that it was not easy for even the most powerful companies to manage multiple institutional environments simultaneously. Nonetheless, Google's actions and words did bring about some awareness of the ethical gaps as companies such as Microsoft invited more scrutiny and pressure to make similar changes.

Pulling its search engine out of China in 2010 has cost Google billions in advertising revenue alone (O'Brien, 2015). Two years after its exit, Google softened its tone toward China in an attempt to reenter the market and focus more on commercial products such as the Android system and search engines designed for comparison shopping (Efrati & Chao, 2012). However, Google's engagement with China remains troubled. By the end of 2014, Gmail was completely blocked in China (Onyanga-Omara, 2014). More recently, in April 2015, Google blacklisted thousands of websites verified by China Internet Network Information Center, a sign of deepening mistrust between the most powerful Internet company and the country with the largest Internet market (Dou, 2015). Although no formal testimony has been offered by Google regarding its battle with China over the Internet, the company has continued to use its blogs to explicate its official positions. Corporations have been found to use blogs as a more personal way of sense making and relationship building (Kelleher & Miller, 2006). A follow-up study could examine Google's discourse reflected in its blogs since 2010 and investigate its use of rhetorical strategies longitudinally.

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