

# Tensions in the strategic integration of corporate sustainability through global standards: Evidence from Japan and South Korea

Enrico Fontana, Hyemi Shin, Chikako Oka, and Jos Gamble.

**Final Published Version deposited by Coventry University's Repository**

**Original citation & hyperlink:**

Fontana, E., Shin, H., Oka, C. and Gamble, J., 2021. Tensions in the strategic integration of corporate sustainability through global standards: Evidence from Japan and South Korea. *Business Strategy and the Environment*.

<https://dx.doi.org/10.1002/bse.2923>

DOI [10.1002/bse.2923](https://dx.doi.org/10.1002/bse.2923)

ISSN 0964-4733

ESSN 1099-0836

Publisher: Taylor and Francis

© 2021 The Authors. *Business Strategy and The Environment* published by ERP Environment and John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

This is an open access article under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution](#) License, which permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Tensions in the strategic integration of corporate sustainability through global standards: Evidence from Japan and South Korea

Enrico Fontana<sup>1,2</sup>  | Hyemi Shin<sup>3</sup>  | Chikako Oka<sup>4,5</sup> | Jos Gamble<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Management, Sasin School of Management, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand

<sup>2</sup>Mistra Centre for Sustainable Markets, Stockholm School of Economics, Stockholm, Sweden

<sup>3</sup>School of Strategy and Leadership, Faculty of Business and Law, Coventry University, Coventry, UK

<sup>4</sup>Université Paris-Est Créteil, Créteil, France

<sup>5</sup>Université Gustave Eiffel, Marne-la-Vallée, France

<sup>6</sup>School of Management, Royal Holloway, University of London, London, UK

## Correspondence

Enrico Fontana, Sasin Graduate Institute of Business Administration of Chulalongkorn University, Sasa Patasala Building, Soi Chula 12, Phayathai Road, Pathum Wan 10330, Bangkok, Thailand.

Email: enrico.fontana@sasin.edu

## Funding information

European Institute for Japanese Studies; Centre for Social and Sustainable Innovation (CSSI); Newmont Goldcorp Inc.

## Abstract

Despite the importance of the conflicting dimensions of corporate sustainability for business strategy, little is known about the tensions that derive from adopting global environmental and social standards in East Asia. Through 65 in-depth interviews conducted in Tokyo and Seoul, this article examines the tensions—and reactions to these tensions—of corporate sustainability managers tasked with the implementation of such standards in Japanese and South Korean multinational corporations. These represent key contexts of inquiry because of their normative tradition of corporate sustainability and geographical closeness. While elucidating that corporate sustainability managers in both countries encounter societal-commercial, traditional-modern, and individual-collective tensions, the article describes the ways they react differently to these tensions. This article contributes to the literature on corporate sustainability and tensions and the contextual literature on corporate sustainability in Japan and South Korea, ultimately offering takeaways for the strategic planning of multinational corporations.

## KEYWORDS

business strategy, corporate sustainability, Japan, managers, multinational corporations, South Korea, tensions

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Due to the mission of corporate sustainability (CS) to respond to environmental, social, and economic stakeholders concurrently (Engert et al., 2016; Nwoba et al., 2021), multinational corporations (MNCs) inevitably face tensions when strategically integrating CS into their organization (Cormier & Magnan, 2015; Hahn et al., 2010; Hengst et al., 2020; Smith & Lewis, 2011; van Bommel, 2018). These tensions derive, for instance, from managers' expectations about accomplishing triple bottom line trade-offs (Hahn et al., 2014), aligning individual and corporate values (Hoffmann, 2018; Sharma & Jaiswal, 2018), avoiding interdepartmental competition (van der

Byl & Slawinski, 2015), and reconciling short- and long-term strategic goals (Gao & Bansal, 2013; Slawinski & Bansal, 2015). Understanding tensions, and the ways managers react to these tensions, is crucial for MNCs to successfully integrate CS into business strategy (Epstein et al., 2015; Hahn et al., 2015; Hörisch et al., 2020; Sitaloppi et al., 2020).

In Japanese and South Korean (Korean) MNCs—highly comparable for their governance style and geographical closeness in East Asia (Steers & Shim, 2020)—CS has been traditionally understood as a set of normative expectations to act for the longevity and well-being of business, environment, and people (Hemmert, 2020; Kim et al., 2004; Todeschini, 2011; Wagner-Tsukamoto, 2009). Following the Asian

This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

© 2021 The Authors. Business Strategy and The Environment published by ERP Environment and John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

financial crisis of 1997 and in the face of the global CS movement in the West, Japanese MNCs (Goto & Sueyoshi, 2020) and Korean MNCs (Paik et al., 2019) faced mounting pressure to strategically redesign their CS in accordance with global environmental and social standards. These are defined as voluntary and international certifications or policies that explicitly evaluate and attest MNCs' efforts to attend to the problems of environmental stakeholders (e.g., through the ISO 14001 standard) and social stakeholders (e.g., through the ISO 26000 standard) (Beschoner & Müller, 2007; Schouten et al., 2014; Wagner, 2020; Welch et al., 2002). Against this backdrop, CS managers in Japanese (Eweje & Sasaki, 2015) and Korean MNCs (Park et al., 2015) cover a particularly salient function as professionals who work in the CS department and are tasked with the implementation of global standards.

Given the growing recognition of CS as “Global” (Aguinis, 2011; Carroll, 2021; Visser, 2010), it is here assumed that CS managers as part of Japanese and Korean MNCs may be subject to tensions and react to them as they replace their normative tradition to CS with a new understanding of CS based on global standards. Despite the importance of managing tensions to successfully integrate CS into business strategy (Hahn et al., 2015; Sitaloppi et al., 2020), there is little knowledge of the tensions of CS managers from implementing global standards in MNCs. Apart from few exceptions (Fontana, 2020; Shin, Cho, et al., 2021), this is particularly the case outside Western and especially North American contexts (Epstein et al., 2015; Gao & Bansal, 2013). Hence, this article echoes calls to deepen understanding of the tensions associated with CS at the level of the implementers (Hahn et al., 2010; Hahn et al., 2015) by posing the following questions:

1. What, if any, are the tensions experienced by CS managers in Japanese and Korean MNCs when implementing global standards associated with CS?
2. How do CS managers in Japanese and Korean MNCs react to such tensions?

In response to these questions, this study theoretically combines the literature on CS and tensions and the contextual literature on CS in Japan and Korea. It builds specifically on Smith and Lewis's (2011) analytical framework, which serves as an important point of departure because it provides a categorization and discussion of tensions that has gained wide acceptance in CS scholarship (van der Byl & Slawinski, 2015).

Empirically, this article relies on a rich dataset of primary data, predominantly constituted by 65 open-ended and semistructured interviews. These were conducted almost entirely face-to-face in Tokyo and Seoul between 2012 and 2017 with CS managers from Japanese and Korean MNCs.

This study offers two key theoretical contributions.

First, it contributes to the literature on CS and tensions by offering novel theorizing and a contextual perspective of tensions. Hence, it demonstrates that tensions do not solely emerge due to the inherently inconsistent dimensions of CS but also from the

difficult reconciliation of a normative and pre-existing meaning of CS and a global understanding of CS centered around global standards.

Second, it advances contextual literature on CS in Japan and Korea by bringing into the analysis the perspective of CS managers and by shedding light on how their reactions to tensions are influenced by corporate culture. While this article indicates that corporate culture in Japan produces obedient CS managers, it shows that the ongoing contestation of Korean CS managers against global standards and the top management can open opportunities for effective change.

Finally, this article conveys takeaways for the strategic planning of MNCs and especially with the aim of addressing grand challenges. While takeaways are centered on top MNC managers' efforts to equally commit to CS's normative foundation, they stress the need to put global standards in context and ensure that CS managers have a more participatory role with stakeholders.

## 2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 | The strategic integration of CS and tensions

Scholars and managers agree that the integration of CS is inherently strategic because of its focus on serving environmental, social and economic stakeholders (Engert et al., 2016; Hörisch et al., 2020; Nwoba et al., 2021). Hence, CS is associated with business strategy and defined as “the series of proactive and responsive actions designed by a firm to tackle latent and expressed social and environmental issues facing the market” (Nwoba et al., 2021:787). The strategic integration of CS is however complex and often fuels CS tensions because of the difficulty to accomplish value concurrently for environmental, social and business stakeholders (Feix & Philippe, 2018; Hoffmann, 2018; Margolis & Walsh, 2003). These tensions emerge especially among managers who work with CS and are tasked with adopting it in their organization (Cormier & Magnan, 2015; Hahn et al., 2015; Hengst et al., 2020; Sitaloppi et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2013). Understanding the tensions, and reactions, associated with the strategic integration of CS is particularly relevant because they offer insight into the nature of competing demands that influence the ways CS becomes part of business strategy (Hahn et al., 2015; Sitaloppi et al., 2020). Epstein et al. (2015:35) state that “simultaneously manage social, environmental and financial performance is one of the most critical challenges” to integrate CS into business strategy.

Drawing on Smith and Lewis's (2011) analytical framework, CS scholars show four types of tension that managers might experience during the strategic integration process: *performing*, *belonging*, *organizing*, and *learning* tensions.

*Performing tensions* arise because of the “plurality of stakeholders and their competing strategies and goals” (Smith & Lewis, 2011:384), thereby prompting managers to fulfill inconsistent objectives at a crossroads between environment, people and business (Hengst

et al., 2020; Pinkse et al., 2019). van Bommel (2018), for instance, defines performing tensions as those originating from the imperative of CS to satisfy environmental, social and economic interests, which are irreconcilable and compete with each other.

*Belonging tensions* emerge because of contradictions between personal values and those promoted at the organizational level. Managers experience belonging tensions because of the distance they perceive from their organization's culture, its hierarchical structure, policies, incentive systems, and inclination toward CS (Bansal, 2003; Hoffmann, 2018; Sharma & Jaiswal, 2018). According to Hahn et al. (2015), belonging tensions are fueled by the divide between an organization's response to CS and its managers' aspirations, which are shaped by broader institutional and societal stimuli.

*Organizing tensions* derive from competing structures and processes in the organization. They emanate from internal structural decisions (Smith & Lewis, 2011) and concern how much freedom, budget, and accountability to collocate to the CS department vis-à-vis other departments (van der Byl & Slawinski, 2015).

Finally, *learning tensions* derive from diverging time horizons in the process of “building upon and destroying the past to create the future” (Smith & Lewis, 2011: 383). Due to its long time span, CS often contrasts with organizations' short-term horizon (Gao & Bansal, 2013; Slawinski & Bansal, 2012). As a result, managers experience learning tensions because their organization is confronted with intertemporal choice problems of CS, that is, having to reconcile short-term business objectives with long-term needs of their stakeholders (Hahn et al., 2010; Hahn et al., 2015).

Despite the importance of CS for business strategy, little is known about the possible tensions experienced by managers in MNCs tasked with strategically integrating ‘Global’ CS standards. Global standards are broadly defined as voluntary and international certifications that explicitly evaluate and attest MNCs' efforts to attend not only to the issues of environmental (e.g., ISO 14001) and social (e.g., ISO 26000) stakeholders but also to the policies of international CS indexes (e.g., United Nations Global Compact and Dow Jones Sustainability Index) (Beschoner & Müller, 2007; Schouten et al., 2014; Wagner, 2020; Welch et al., 2002). Moreover, the growing influence of global standards associated with CS—often viewed as a grand transition toward “Global” CS (Aguinis, 2011; Carroll, 2021)—is believed in the literature to possibly interfere with different understandings of CS at the contextual level (Hahn et al., 2018; Visser, 2010). It can therefore be assumed that the implementation of global standards may lead to tensions in MNCs, especially among managers in contexts with a pre-existing and normative understandings of CS.

While the CS literature on tensions has predominantly drawn evidence from MNCs headquartered in Western nations, especially North America (Epstein et al., 2015; Gao & Bansal, 2013), much remains to be explored about the tensions of managers working on the implementation of global standards in MNCs based in contexts characterized by a pre-existing normative tradition of CS. For this purpose, the next section provides an overview of CS in Japanese and Korean MNCs over time.

## 2.2 | A focus on CS in Japanese and Korean MNCs

Japanese and Korean MNCs have a past of normative understanding of CS that recognizes unspoken and implicit virtue (Boardman & Kato, 2003; Lee et al., 2009). The 1997 Asian financial crisis and the global CS movement in the West exerted pressure to modernize their governance style and reconfigure CS around global standards (Miles, 2006; Miles & Goo, 2013; Tanimoto, 2017). While global standards help Japanese and Korean MNCs maintain international legitimacy, the tensions of their CS managers remain underexplored. Both in Japanese (Eweje & Sasaki, 2015) and Korean MNCs (Park et al., 2015), CS managers are key because they are tasked with the implementation of such standards. As covered in the following subsections, much evidence on CS in these contexts draws on national and macro analyses but often excludes the level of the implementers (Fontana, 2020; Shin, Cho, et al., 2021; Shin, Vu, et al., 2021).

### 2.2.1 | The evolution of CS in Japanese MNCs

The emergence of CS in Japan reflects the establishment of MNCs through *keiretsu*—a structure of corporate groupings administered by a few families. During the postwar era, the meaning of CS became associated with an implicit relationship between business, environment, and people (Fukukawa & Moon, 2004; Todeschini, 2011; Wagner-Tsukamoto, 2009). This characterization was premised upon a communitarian corporate culture where top managers were admired as fathers (Miles, 2006) – what Husted (2015:131) labels as “employer paternalism”—and “in which they [employees] comply with collectively decided social rules” (Kumar et al., 2019:1127).

A practical example of CS in Japan is embodied by Canon Inc.'s application of the principle of *Kyosei*—“symbiosis” or “cooperation” (Boardman & Kato, 2003). Scholars consider this not only to promote environmental interests and group membership (Eweje & Sasaki, 2015) but also to “indoctrinate” employees (Chikudate, 2009) and foster ‘collective myopia’ (Chikudate, 2015). The pressure to modernize their governance style brought by the global CS movement in the West, however, led Japanese MNCs to reconfigure their CS around global standards (Miles & Goo, 2013; Tanimoto, 2017). This transition spurred Japanese MNCs to communicate that their CS is “integral to their business strategy and have various projects and initiatives to support their position and commitment” (Eweje & Sasaki, 2015:678), but also led to a schism in the literature.

Despite evidence on the link between global standards and corporate value (Endo, 2020; Fujii et al., 2013; Nishitani & Kokubu, 2012), some scholars view global standards as an imposition rather than an opportunity for change (Fukukawa & Teramoto, 2009; Kobayashi et al., 2018). Goto and Sueyoshi (2020), for instance, claim that global standards can be detrimental for Japanese MNCs and add bureaucratic work. By contrast, other scholars concur on the advantage of global standards but accuse Japanese MNCs of exploiting it. Mun and Jung (2018), for instance, show how Japanese MNCs adopt gender equality standards for their image while de facto

concealing female disempowerment. Others, meanwhile, claim that in Japanese MNCs, “[CS] practices in recent years have not changed much” (Park et al., 2015:757), therefore hinting at the poor management of these standards. These scholars expose the problem of adopting global standards for decoupling purposes (Fontana, 2020), thereby calling for a cultural shift (Sugita & Takahashi, 2015) and the education of the top management (Hosoda & Suzuki, 2015; Nakamura, 2011).

### 2.2.2 | The evolution of CS in Korean MNCs

In Korea, CS emerged in line with a plan to boost prosperity at the national level during the economic boom following the Korean War (1950–1953). This is when the Korean business community united around *chaebols* or large industrial conglomerates owned and administered by a handful of affluent families (Kim et al., 2004; Yoo & Lee, 1987). Similar to Japan, the initial meaning of CS in Korea was connected with a normative and implicit template mirroring the paternalistic corporate culture of its MNCs. Top managers were praised by employees as fatherly figures (Hemmert, 2020) and employee relations often extended beyond corporate boundaries to include *Yongo*—informal social networks as quasi-families—where people with the same background felt “affectionately bonded” (Horak & Taube, 2016; Horak & Yang, 2018).

In 1997, however, Korean MNCs just like other *chaebols* carried much of the blame for the governance scandals that led to the Asian financial crisis (Chang, 2003; Kim et al., 2004). Their governance style and framing of CS fell under scrutiny due to poor transparency and lack of disclosure (Kim et al., 2013; Kim & Kim, 2010). Under pressure from the government to align with the guidelines of the International Monetary Fund (Froese, 2020; Kim et al., 2004; Shin, 2016), Korean MNCs reformulated their CS as a conflation of philanthropic activities for the environment and people (Chang et al., 2017; Chapple & Moon, 2005; Lee et al., 2009) with the adoption of global standards (Yang & Rhee, 2020). Two scholarly narratives have since evolved.

One narrative emphasizes the strategic significance for Korean MNCs to adopt global standards to win back public support (Park & Park, 2016), enhance competitiveness (Kim et al., 2013), increase performance (Choi & Yi, 2018; Lee et al., 2016), and attain higher productivity (Woo et al., 2014). Through an examination of Korean MNCs in the electronics industry, for instance, Park et al. (2015) demonstrate that Korean MNCs adopt global standards around specific stakeholders, thereby improving their strategic prowess and supporting such stakeholders' needs.

By contrast, a second narrative critiques Korean MNCs' reformulation of CS around global standards as window-dressing for the public (Park & Park, 2016). The scholars involved accuse global standards of creating little change for the environment and people (Baek, 2018) and as eroding the philanthropic purpose of CS (Park, 2018). While Rhee and Lee (2003) accuse Korean MNCs as using global standards as a rhetorical device, Paik et al. (2019) rebuke

Korean managers for acting solely for their own personal interests. Similarly, Lee (2007) argues that the capacity of Korean MNCs to contribute to the local environment and people had become increasingly limited.

## 3 | RESEARCH METHODS

This article adopts a qualitative method design. Contrary to positivist approaches, qualitative studies “are more sensitive to, and adaptable to, the many mutually shaping influences and value patterns” that shape reality as socially constructed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:40). Hence, they aim at evidencing the multiple realities experienced by their informants (Pratt et al., 2020). A qualitative method design is particularly opportune when examining tensions, which can only be understood through the rhetoric of those who experience them (Siltaloppi et al., 2020). Comparing understudied settings such as Japanese and Korean MNCs adds depth to the analysis, thereby providing an important and additional source of theorizing (Steers & Shim, 2020).

### 3.1 | Theoretical sampling

Our study builds on a rich pool of data constituted by 65, open-ended and semistructured interviews with CS managers. These data are provided by 32 CS managers from 23 Japanese MNCs and 33 CS managers from 20 Korean MNCs, all operating in distinct groups of industries. As indicated in Table 1, the Japanese and Korean CS managers were highly comparable in terms of gender and age. Most of the CS managers in Japanese MNCs (19 out of thirty-32) and Korean MNCs (23 out of 33) identified themselves as male. The largest age group among the CS managers in Japanese MNCs (12 out of 32) and Korean MNCs (22 out of 33) included those between 35 and 45 years old.

The interviews were conducted over a prolonged period of time—between 2012 and 2017—in order to reach theoretical saturation and ensure a substantive richness of information (Guest et al., 2006). Except for one interview with the CS manager at JMNC-P—conducted via conference call—all interviews were completed face-to-face in Tokyo and Seoul, the capital cities and commercial hubs of Japan and Korea. The formal interviews lasted between 20 to 120 min with an average of 65 min each, apart from informal discussions after the interview. These were conducted at the workplace of the CS managers and, in limited cases, in cafés. Table 1 shows the MNCs of the sample and their CS managers.

In order to ensure rigor and the internal validity of the sample (Yin, 2003), the CS managers were selected according to the following criteria:

1. In line with the focus of the study on CS and tensions (Siltaloppi et al., 2020), only CS managers working in Japanese and Korean MNCs across different industries were invited.

**TABLE 1** Sample of informants

Country	MNCs (43)	Industry	CS managers (65)	Gender and age group	Stage of data collection <sup>a</sup>
Japan	JMNC-A	Retailing	1	(F: 45–55)	Second stage
	JMNC-B	Holdings	3	(M: 35–45) (F: 45–55) (M: 55–65)	Second and third stages
	JMNC-C	IT/electronics	1	(M: 35–45)	Second stage
	JMNC-D	Automotive	1	(M: 35–45)	Second stage
	JMNC-E	Holdings	1	(M: 45–55)	Second stage
	JMNC-F	Finance	1	(M: 45–55)	Second stage
	JMNC-G	IT/electronics	2	(M: 55–65) (M: 45–55)	Second and third stages
	JMNC-H	Finance	2	(M: 55–65) (F: 35–45)	Second and third stages
	JMNC-I	IT/electronics	2	(F: 25–35) (M: 45–55)	Second stage
	JMNC-J	Pharmaceutical	1	(M: 45–55)	Second stage
	JMNC-K	Chemicals	1	(F: 45–55)	Second stage
	JMNC-L	IT/electronics	2	(F: 55–65) (F: 55–65)	Second and third stages
	JMNC-M	Media	1	(M: 35–45)	Third stage
	JMNC-N	Automotive	1	(F: 35–45)	Third stage
	JMNC-O	Apparels	1	(M: 45–55)	Third stage
	JMNC-P	Apparels	1	(M: 55–65)	Third stage
	JMNC-Q	Media	1	(F: 35–45)	Third stage
	JMNC-R	Apparel	2	(F: 35–45) (M: 35–45)	Third stage
	JMNC-S	Apparel	2	(F: 45–55) (M: 25–35)	Third stage
	JMNC-T	Holdings	2	(F: 35–45) (M: 35–45)	Third stage
JMNC-U	Glass	1	(F: 35–45)	Third stage	
JMNC-V	Consulting	1	(M: 25–35)	Third stage	
JMNC-W	Optics	1	(M: 55–65)	Third stage	
South Korea	KMNC-A	Aviation	1	(M: 35–45)	First stage
	KMNC-B	Finance	1	(M: 35–45)	First stage
	KMNC-C	Holdings	1	(M: 35–45)	First stage
	KMNC-D	IT/electronics	1	(M: 35–45)	First stage
	KMNC-E	Automotive	1	(M: 35–45)	First stage
	KMNC-F	Steel	1	(F: 35–45)	First stage
	KMNC-G	Construction	2	(M: 35–45) (M: 35–45)	First stage
	KMNC-H	Telecom	4	(M: 35–45) (M: 45–55) (M: 35–45) (F: 35–45)	First stage
	KMNC-I	Steel	4	(M: 35–45) (M: 45–55) (F: 45–55) (F: 25–35)	First stage
	KMNC-J	Aviation	1	(M: 35–45)	First stage
	KMNC-K	Holdings	1	(M: 35–45)	First stage
	KMNC-L	Telecom	2	(M: 45–55) (F: 35–45)	First stage
	KMNC-M	Telecom	1	(M: 45–55)	First stage
	KMNC-N	Holdings	3	(M: 35–45) (M: 25–35) (F: 35–45)	First stage
	KMNC-O	Holdings	1	(M: 35–45)	First stage
	KMNC-P	Construction	2	(M: 35–45) (F: 25–35)	First stage
	KMNC-Q	Media	1	(M: 45–55)	First stage
	KMNC-R	Finance	1	(M: 35–45)	First stage
	KMNC-S	Tobacco	1	(F: 35–45)	First stage
	KMNC-T	Automotive	2	(M: 35–45) (F: 25–35)	First stage

<sup>a</sup>While the first stage of data collection was conducted between September 2012 and December 2013, the second stage stretched between April 2015 and April 2016. The third stage was completed between October 2016 and March 2017.



2. With the exception of one CS manager at JMNC-P, only CS managers available for face-to-face interviews were selected. This allowed the authors to have open discussions about global standards, lowering the possible emergence of any social desirability bias (Randall & Fernandes, 1991).
3. To ensure comparability and originality, only Japanese and Korean citizens were recruited. An exception was made for two CS managers at Japanese MNC-R and Japanese MNC-T because they had spent the majority of their life in Japan.

### 3.2 | Data collection

The data were collected systematically through three distinct stages occurring between September 2012 and March 2017.

The first stage of the research sought to identify the tensions of CS managers in Korean MNCs. Between September 2012 and December 2013, 33 CS managers from 20 Korean MNCs were recruited and interviewed. Since one of the authors is native of the Korean peninsula, all respondents were interviewed in the local language. The CS managers were initially identified and contacted through social media sources—Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter (Suddaby et al., 2015). The personal contacts of the authors also helped establish a first connection. Hence, a mini pilot project began in September 2012 with three CS managers to fine-tune the interview template and glean insights about the perceptions of CS managers in Korean MNCs. Snowballing was useful to access the local professional circles of CS managers in Seoul.

During the second stage of the data collection between April 2015 and April 2016, the authors turned their attention to Japan. During this period, 13 interviews were completed with CS managers belonging to thirteen Japanese MNCs. Since one of the authors is native of Japan, most of these interviews were conducted in Japanese. Personal contacts were utilized to garner access to the MNCs, and two separate trips to Tokyo were organized to perform the interviews. In tune with the data collection process in Korea, the first interviews of 2015 were utilized to test the questionnaire, which was then adopted to complete the majority of interviews in 2016.

The third and final stage of the data collection was centered on terminating the interviews with CS managers in Japanese MNCs. For this purpose, the authors remained in Tokyo between October 2016 to March 2017 and attended different events to gain further access into the local CS community. These events, together with the existing contacts and additional snowballing, helped reach out to a greater pool of CS managers. During this last part of the process, an additional round of 19 interviews—7 in Japanese and 12 in English—was conducted in English and Japanese with CS managers belonging to 15 MNCs.

### 3.3 | Data analysis

Except for two interviews in Korea (each from KMNC-C and KMNC-D), all interviews were recorded and transcribed. The transcripts in

Japanese and Korean language were translated by the authors into English. In analyzing the interview data, abductive reasoning was adopted from pragmatism and organization studies as a philosophical paradigm. Abductive reasoning comprises going back and forth iteratively between observations from the empirical world and the theoretical domain. Hence, it involves activities of both deduction and induction that serve to evaluate, confirm, and possibly extend existing propositions (Sætre & van de Ven, 2021). In the analysis of the data, this article embraced Dunne and Dougherty's (2016) framing of abductive reasoning from organization studies as a process of grounded theory. This is acknowledged as a rigorous analytical method in the social sciences that is predicated upon Corbin and Strauss's (2008) (i) open coding, (ii) axial coding, and (iii) selective coding.

The analysis of the data commenced through open coding, which is aimed at fleshing out empirical themes. In seeking such themes, more crucially, particular attention was paid to remaining as close as possible to the CS managers' rhetoric. Thanks to the wealth of data collected, it was possible to capture and group the passages indicating the tensions and viewpoints that the CS managers attributed to their work with strategically integrating global standards. The evolving interpretations and nascent ideas of the authors about the CS managers' descriptions were then coded manually and transferred into a tailored Microsoft Excel file. A comparative lens was maintained, thereby highlighting commonalities and differences between the CS managers' rhetoric based on their country. When possible, the interviews were triangulated with notes, including those collected during CS events in Japan and Korea (Pratt et al., 2020).

Axial coding was later adopted to increase the level of abstraction around recursive patterns, thereby formulating hypotheses around identified “anomalies” in the CS literature and benchmarking them against the data (Dunne & Dougherty, 2016; Sætre & van de Ven, 2021).

From 10 abstract themes and in line with the 2 research questions, selective coding was adopted to identify 6 conceptual categories in the study. These were *societal-commercial tensions*, *traditional-modern tensions*, *individual-collective tensions*, answering the first research question and *reactions to societal-commercial tensions*, *reactions to traditional-modern tensions*, *reactions to individual-collective tensions* answering the second research question. Table 2 provides a list of these categories, together with abstract themes, empirical themes and representative quotes obtained from the abductive process of thematic analysis.

## 4 | FINDINGS

While drawing on Smith and Lewis's (2011) analytical framework, the findings respond to the first research question in the three sections by unveiling the tensions experienced by CS managers tasked with implementing global standards<sup>1</sup> in Japanese and Korean MNCs. Subsequently, the last three sections answer the second research

**TABLE 2** Thematic analysis through abductive reasoning

Categories (selective coding)	Abstract themes (axial coding)	Empirical themes (open coding)	Representative quotes
Societal-commercial tensions	Promotional pressure	CS managers in Japan and Korea believe their MNC adopts and discloses global standards to accomplish business targets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Integrated reporting is becoming very popular. Over a hundred Japanese companies are issuing integrated reports, so it looks like they are advanced on the surface. But they are simply following the industry trend, and the content is lacking. (JMNC-H)</li> <li>- What I see from global standards and CS reports, it seems like a business. What does a firm get from them? Companies adopt it because other companies do [for competitiveness]. (KMNC-R)</li> </ul>
	Top-down pressure	CS managers in Japan and Korea attribute the lack of environmental and social engagement of their MNC to the top management's emphasis on corporate reputation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- It is really the top management that needs to be educated. Instead of delegating global standards to a disempowered CS department and asking us to come up with something nice, the top management needs to have a better understanding of the environmental and social contribution for Japan. And then, make sure that everybody in the company follows suit. (JMNC-V)</li> <li>- When our CS team was launched, we had the support of the [prior] CEO [...]; however, [with the new CEO] our team has been downsized and touches upon CS in a too narrow way. It is [now] only a social contribution that could be used for public relations. (KMNC-G)</li> </ul>
Traditional-modern tensions	Emphasized disclosure	CS managers in Japanese and Korean MNCs struggle with learning about how to best disclose environmental and social contributions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- We are expected to learn more about [global] standards and show results [...]; we are seriously discussing how to, you know, study together even more [laughter] to improve our CS report. But reporting [global] standards does not convey clear benefits for the environment and society, it can be demotivating. (JMNC-H)</li> <li>- A key to a CS report is to follow the GRI guidelines. The required contents are too much and super complex. Thus, when we started for the first time, we did not know how to get relevant data from different departments of our firm. We had a little bumpy start, but we have learned by trial and error. (KMNC-H)</li> </ul>
	Local incompatibility	CS managers in Japanese and Korean MNCs fail to recognize that the value of their learning can be utilized to improve their country and the local stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A lot of the movement to adopt [global] standards and disclose all of the corporate information started outside Japan. Because their [foreigners] mindset is like, everything has to be written down. So, this is what we are asked to learn now [to report]. But is this knowledge [about global standards] really helping the communities in Japan? (JMNC-N)</li> </ul>

(Continues)



TABLE 2 (Continued)

Categories (selective coding)	Abstract themes (axial coding)	Empirical themes (open coding)	Representative quotes
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- When ISO 26000 was developed in the beginning, many Korean companies were asked to participate in the discussion so, we thought something really important would come out. After its launch, however, the impact of ISO 26000 is very insignificant. [...] We learn and take various global indices as guidance, but they are not helping much in creating change locally. (KMNC-H)</li> </ul>
Individual- collective tensions	Ethical conundrum	CS managers in Japanese and Korean MNCs feel conflicted by the perceived divide between personal values and the objectives of global standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- We know that [global] standards are relevant to survive in the international market, but it will not become a decisive factor for environmental and social outcomes [...]; unfortunately, this is the reality of our work. Yes, to be honest, it often makes me think. (JMNC-G).</li> <li>- If we help a kid in need, the top management team and shareholders would be happy to publicize this activity with a photo of this kid. However, as a CS manager who used to be a social worker, I say no to that for the sake of this kid. I would like to confront them, even though a faceless photo might not get much publicity. (KMNC-I)</li> </ul>
Reactions to societal-commercial tensions	Managerial adhering	CS managers in Japanese MNCs follow their top management's take on global standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Japanese [employees] love their company and their leaders. The founders of very famous Japanese companies said that a company is something public and must serve a public purpose. That influences the way people understand global standards. And Japanese always follow their business leaders in the end. (JMNC-R)</li> </ul>
	Soft activism	CS managers in Korean MNCs increasingly critique their top management about global standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- As sinners of the financial crisis, Korean companies started their social contribution activities even harder [...] I think it is rooted in our DNA that we have to criticize companies and chaebols, which are fundamentally bad [...]; the owners know they have to do this [beyond global standards]. (KMNC-M)</li> </ul>
Reactions to traditional-modern tensions	Passive absorbing	CS managers in Japanese and Korean MNCs learn about social standards minimally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- My role in CS is to learn and be a translator between the Western and Japanese CS, which are totally different. For instance, tax strategy is the current hot topic [globally]. But we do not really need to have the same tax policy [...]. I just apply it but...I know we'll get no benefit from these lessons. (JMNC-H)</li> <li>- I am interested in learning how to evaluate CS programs and standards</li> </ul>

TABLE 2 (Continued)

Categories (selective coding)	Abstract themes (axial coding)	Empirical themes (open coding)	Representative quotes
			these days, but I do not apply them. (KMNC-H)
Reactions to individual-collective tensions	Professional detachment	CS managers in Japanese MNCs separate job expectations from personal goals, which they pursue outside their work	- CS is emotional, because I have personal causes that seem to have not much relation to what we do as a business. But as a CS department we try to focus on what makes sense for the business so that it relates back to society. I would say, I must buy their collective values and leave mine aside as long as I work here. For sure, these are the expectations of my company. (JMNC-R)
	Extended networking	CS managers in Korean MNCs seek affectionate ties with peers outside the MNC	- There are various informal and formal CS managers gatherings [outside the MNC]. They mostly end up with friendly meetings. (KMNC-S)

Abbreviation: MNC, multinational corporation.

question by elucidating CS managers' reactions to such tensions. Figure 1 delivers a synthesis of the process of analysis.

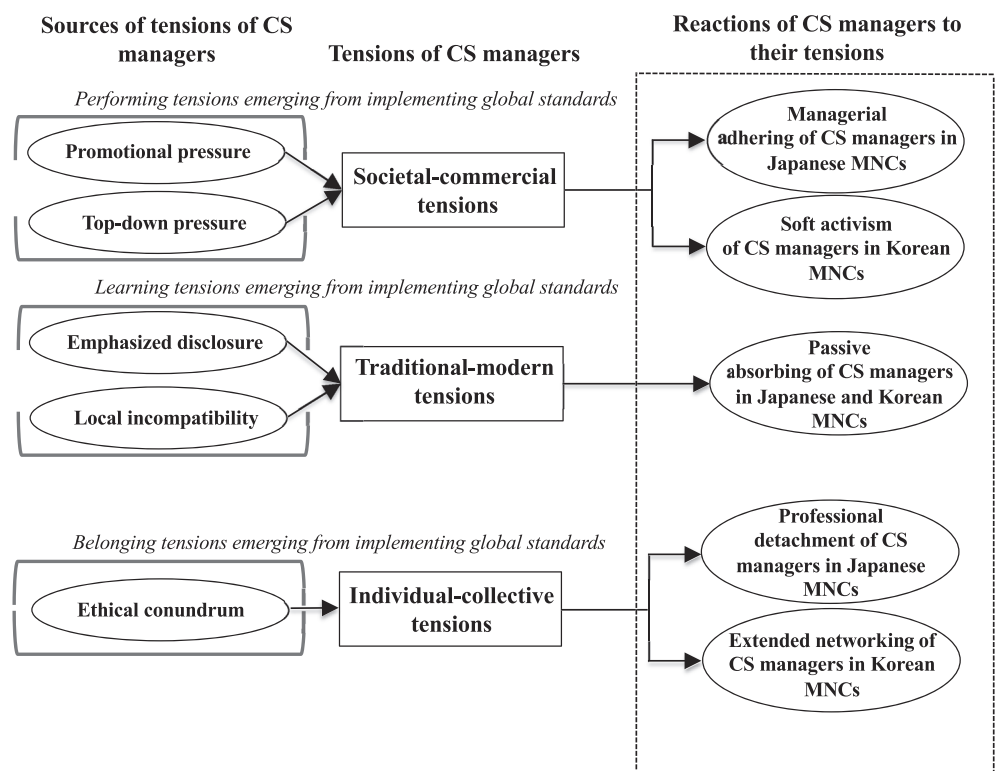
### 4.1 | The societal-commercial tensions of CS managers

The findings outline the co-occurrence of societal-commercial tensions. As performing tensions, these surface when job goals are

conflictual and contradictory (Smith & Lewis, 2011). The CS managers in Japanese and Korean MNCs similarly felt that their efforts to strategically integrate global standards as part of their job did not advance environmental and social causes as much as commercial objectives. The analysis of the data allowed the identification of two main sources of societal-commercial tensions: (1) *Promotional pressure* and (2) *Top-down pressure*.

*Promotional pressure* results from the focus of MNCs on requiring the adoption and disclosure of global standards to accomplish

FIGURE 1 CS managers' tensions from global standards and reactions



business targets. The majority of the CS managers interviewed in Japan and Korea grappled with the priority assigned by their MNCs to promote global standards and achieve market value rather than doing good. For instance, the CS managers in Japanese MNCs often struggled with accepting that the “CS department is becoming a public relations department to make the company look better globally” (JMNC-S) or “to lead the international image of the company” (JMNC-G). In their job, these CS managers felt compelled to cherry-pick examples of best practice to maximize their MNCs' market exposure. While assuring that MNCs “do not like to disclose things that make them look bad” (JMNC-E), promotional pressure was rooted in the belief that “from a corporate perspective, CS is a management activity [just] for business. It is not a responsibility” (KMNC-S). Promotional pressure emerged from the example of the CS manager at KMNC-S around the ISO 26000 standard for social responsibility:

According to ISO 26000, companies are required to engage with local communities more. However, companies are getting ISO 26000 because they can make a public relations case. A company is calculating its cost and benefit of engaging with global standards, which requires money in the end.

*Top-down pressure* features the emphasis of MNCs to adopt global standards because of the top management's efforts to consolidate their corporate reputation rather than empowering the environment and people. The majority of the CS managers interviewed in Japanese and Korean MNCs concurred that their top management “fully understands that global businesses need global standards” (JMNC-J). Nonetheless, they grappled with accepting top-down pressure at work. They believed that “unfortunately, there are very few top managers who understand” global standards as a tool to do good (JMNC-B) and that “the top management is not sensitive enough about them” (KMNC-F). Top-down pressure was delineated by the reluctance of the CS manager at KMNC-A, who was tasked by the top management with securing a position in the *Dow Jones Sustainability Index*, a group of best practice benchmarks for investors:

Nobody at the top management is truly concerned about social and environmental benefits. It'd be only a by-product. This is for public relations and reputation management. Top managers talk about [global] standards and ask us to check the benefits for society, but that is not what they actually care about.

## 4.2 | The traditional-modern tensions of CS managers

The findings explicate the existence of *traditional-modern* tensions equally experienced by CS managers in Japanese and Korean MNCs as they sought to gain expertise about global standards in their job. In line with the learning tensions described by Smith and Lewis (2011), these materialize when managers struggle to shift from specific modes of knowing and knowledge acquisition toward new ones. Two interrelated sources of traditional-modern tensions were discovered: (1) *Emphasized disclosure* and (2) *Local incompatibility*.

*Emphasized disclosure* is definable as the priority at work assigned to learning about global standards, which required CS managers in Japanese and Korean MNCs to learn about how to best disclose the environmental and social contributions of such standards. Most CS managers in Japanese and Korean MNCs referred to global standards as a “new business” or “new practices” or “new indices”—such as the Dow Jones Sustainability Index and the UN Global Compact—to “continuously learn from” (KMNC-A). They credited their job with having to “study many things” and sought to keep up with updates of global standards (KMNC-I). On the contrary, emphasized disclosure made CS managers feel compelled to focus on learning how to disclose global standards but were unsure that such new knowledge—which contrasted their normative tradition of CS—could really support environmental and social stakeholders. Emphasized disclosure emerged from the vignette of the CS manager at JMNC-M when discussing global standards in general:

Companies' operations are getting global. Japanese companies work with foreign colleagues and customers. They do not understand how we think about our environment and people in our traditions. Before, there was no word for CS, but we did do philanthropic activities for the community. That is really challenging. We must learn how to report our CS through [global] standards like Western companies.

*Local incompatibility* is typified by the recognition that learning about global standards at work could be beneficial for business but not necessarily for the local context. The majority of the CS managers in Japanese and Korean MNCs concurred that “global standards as evaluation tools do not reflect our local situation” (KMNC-L). They felt disheartened about investing time to learn about global standards that they believed could provide little guarantee to empower their country, including the local environment and its people. As they engaged with learning about global standards as part of their job, they increasingly viewed them as “basic reporting fundamentals” for global business rather than a potential to create change locally (KMNC-H). Local incompatibility was exemplified by the CS manager at JMNC-W who highlighted the context of “human rights”:

I use e-learning to learn about [global] standards from others [global companies] and expand our activities. But I can say that Japanese companies cannot adopt the exact same policies as foreign companies to improve local communities. Take human rights policies.<sup>2</sup> They do not always fit. In Japan, the application of human rights is very different. But I'm asked to learn about [global] human rights policies for our CS report.

## 4.3 | The individual-collective tensions of CS managers

The findings indicate the presence of *individual-collective* tensions. These pertain to belonging tensions and were similarly experienced by the CS managers in Japan and Korea in their efforts to adopt global standards. Belonging tensions crystallize when managers experience conflicts between their inner convictions and the roles assigned to them by their organization (Smith & Lewis, 2011). *Ethical conundrum* unfolded as the main source of individual-collective tensions.

*Ethical conundrum* results from the conflict between one's personal values and the objectives of the MNC associated with implementing global standards. The CS managers interviewed confessed that their work with global standards was not always in tune with their own beliefs and often spurred personal reflections. Although they acknowledged the necessity of ensuring the profitability of their MNC as part of their job and that global standards could be beneficial for this, they felt uncomfortable implementing global standards for the sake of organizational benefits because of their own values. For instance, a conversation with a CS manager at KMNC-I—a former social worker in his previous career—exhibited an ethical conundrum. He would rather value “pure” environmental and social contributions instead of adopting and learning about global standards. Thus, he had a hard time to understand his MNC's attempt to incorporate global standards as part of CS. A similar example of ethical conundrum emerged from the discussion with this CS manager at JMNC-V in the general context of global standards:

Companies in Japan in general, and certainly my company, do not see [true] environmental and social contributions as a profitable part of their business. Global standards are something that they choose to look nice. I'm personally conflicted because my company is not fully committed to society, and especially my [individual] hopes for Japan [...]. Working with these [global] standards has been a source of major personal experience for me, with a lot of frustration.

#### 4.4 | Managerial adhering and soft activism

The evidence indicates a major difference in the ways CS managers in Japanese and Korean MNCs reacted to their societal-commercial tensions. The majority of CS managers in Japanese MNCs engaged with *managerial adhering*. This involves rationalizing their societal-commercial tensions with the belief that helping their MNC accomplish its business targets through global standards could eventually garner opportunities for the environment and people. The CS manager at JMNC-O, for instance, exemplified managerial adhering by highlighting that: I struggle with global standards [...] however, Japanese companies will stop investing in the CS department unless it helps them make profits. As I'm getting profits right now from global standards, our CS department is growing bigger. Because of that, we can do more for the local environment and people.

>Managerial adhering appeared to be rooted in the hierarchical corporate culture of Japanese MNCs (Kumar et al., 2019; Miles, 2006). This exhibited through CS managers' support toward their top management, which was trusted to utilize the economic success of global standards to create environmental and social benefits. Hence, the CS managers sought to resolve their societal-commercial tensions by espousing the top management's guidelines. As the JMNC-UCS manager put it when discussing global standards: “because Japanese blindly follow their top managers, it is about their will and way of thinking that affects CS, including global standards.”

By contrast, the CS managers in Korean MNCs reacted to their societal-commercial tensions through *soft activism*, that is, by growing

increasingly vocal about their top management's decision of implementing global standards. Soft activism seemed to be influenced by a quickly mutating corporate culture in Korean MNCs after the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis (Kim et al., 2004; Shin, 2016), which produced a progressively more outspoken body of CS managers. The majority upheld the belief that, because they saw global standards as being “all about for money” (KMNC-S), “we do them at a very low level, just as others do” (KMNC-R). They refused to accept the commercial opportunity of global standards but also to really navigate their societal-commercial tensions. These CS managers were sometimes opposed by a few other CS managers in the same corporation who got on with their work with global standards. For instance, during a conversation with a CS manager at KMNC-L—who belonged to a large CS department—she expressed her concerns about the views of those who felt societal-commercial tensions strongly and were against global standards as their “view about global standards is not representative” for her MNC.

#### 4.5 | Passive absorbing

The CS managers in Japanese and Korean MNCs reacted equally to their traditional-modern tensions through *passive absorbing*. As they were skeptical that more engagement with learning about global standards could provide additional benefits for their country, including the local stakeholders, they limited their learning to what was prescribed by their job mandate. In Japanese MNCs, *passive absorbing* was exacerbated by CS managers' poor acceptance of global standards as they originated outside of Japan. Their contribution to CS was believed to be largely inferior from their homegrown and normative tradition of CS. Although they tried to resolve their traditional-modern tensions by learning about global standards as part of their job, many of the CS managers in Japanese MNCs hoped to go back to “the Japanese way of thinking” or that “a more philanthropic approach to the environment and people will come back” (JMNC-O). Passive absorbing for instance emerged from the conversation with a CS manager at JMNC-S, who claimed that “Japanese businesspeople, I think they're just very passive [...] Many are not confident about new practices when they come from outside [Japan] because they might not work in Japan [...] We adopt global standards, but we just make sure we learn the basics.”

Although the CS managers in Korean MNCs exhibited nuanced reactions to their societal-commercial tensions, they appeared to be in agreement that “global standards [in general] are nothing new” (KMNC-C). Like the CS managers in Japan, they believed that global standards were “unable to reflect the practical aspects and reality that Korean companies face” (KMNC-G). Thus, they also tried to defuse their traditional-modern tensions by avoiding to learn in depth about global standards. Many CS managers in Korean MNCs disclosed that “we take various global standards as learning guidance, but there's no real pressure [on learning more]”, thereby limiting their engagement with such learning (KMNC-I).

## 4.6 | Professional detachment and extended networking

Finally, the findings indicate that the CS managers in Japanese and Korean MNCs interviewed reacted to their individual-collective tensions in two distinct ways. CS managers in Japanese MNCs engaged with *professional detachment*. This entails separating personal aspirations and convictions from job expectations. Through professional detachment, CS managers in Japanese MNCs tried to resolve their collective-individual tensions by disengaging from feelings of responsibility at work and setting higher personal goals to support the environmental and social causes outside their work. This means that “well, you should not focus on your own goals, but rather on the expectations of consumers and the company about what is good for society [...] but you shouldn't set too ambitious goals for yourself in the company” (JMNC-B). The CS manager at JMNC-V, for instance, exemplified professional detachment by describing that: [N]ot everybody agrees with my environmental and social expectations. But you need to understand the perspective of the people who do not agree with you. I've learned how to separate CS and what I do for living from my own goals, which I do outside working hours.

By contrast, CS managers in Korean MNCs reacted to their collective-individual tensions through *extended networking*, that is, by building personal connections outside their workplace. Extended networking helped the CS managers in Korean MNCs navigate their individual-collective tensions by establishing bonds with similar peers. Extended networking appeared to be based on nurturing affective ties and helped CS managers limit their divergences. A CS manager at KMNC-I explained that: “Since I started, we've gathered regularly like a study group [outside the MNC]. Of course, we're not always ‘studying’ as it's not obligatory. We hang out and have fun drinking beers. We're like friends.”

While CS managers in Korean MNCs sought to establish trust-based relationships as a natural way to express their personal values, extended networking also helped them brainstorm about CS and disclose personal opinions about the implementation of global standards in their MNC. As part of extended networking, for instance, the CS managers initiated “mentoring programs” for new CS manager members (KMNC-G) and “training programs” where incumbent and new members discussed about global standards (KMNC-L). Extended networking helped CS managers bring confidence back to the CS department and influence it from outside.

## 5 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This article sets out to explore the tensions and reactions of CS managers when tasked with implementing global standards in Japanese and Korean MNCs. This study responds directly to calls for more research that addresses the tensions associated with CS at the level of the implementers (Hahn et al., 2010; Hahn et al., 2015) and offers a twofold contribution to the theoretical discourse and important lessons for the strategic planning of MNCs.

## 5.1 | Tensions between normative tradition and global standards

While drawing on Smith and Lewis's (2011) analytical framework, this article advances the literature on CS and tensions by showing how managers in MNCs headquartered in countries with a pre-existing and normative understanding of CS are likely to experience additional tensions when strategically integrating global standards.

The fundamental assumption in prior literature is that tensions within organizations materialize because of the irreconcilable economic, environmental and social dimensions of CS (Cormier & Magnan, 2015; Hahn et al., 2010; Hahn et al., 2015; Slawinski & Bansal, 2012; van der Byl & Slawinski, 2015). Hahn et al. (2015), more specifically, emphasize that Western MNCs, and especially North American MNCs, experience tensions when operating in contexts where the understanding of environmental and social contribution varies (Epstein et al., 2015; Gao & Bansal, 2013). By contrast, this study shows the tensions of non-Western MNCs with CS. These tensions are perceived by managers as they are asked to strategically integrate global standards while reconfiguring a pre-existing and normative tradition of CS.

By conceptualizing *societal-commercial*, *traditional-modern*, and *individual-collective* tensions from the cases of Japanese and Korean MNCs, this article offers additional confirmatory evidence of the pervasiveness of performing, learning, and belonging categories of tensions in organizations (Smith & Lewis, 2011). However, this study goes beyond showing the three types of tensions by uncovering their origin. It demonstrates that tensions can emerge not only because of the inherently inconsistent dimensions of CS but also because of the friction between a pre-existing meaning of CS—entrenched with traditionally embedded normative expectations—and a global understanding of CS—imported from the West under the rubric of global standards. Such friction lies at the root of the tensions experienced by the CS managers interviewed, who failed to recognize global standards as a better way to meet environmental and social stakeholders' expectations. This is due to a philanthropic ideal inculcated on them from their local traditions. Through *promotional pressure* and *top-down pressure*, for instance, the CS managers viewed global standards as a mere business case by associating them with promotional tools, which contrasted their understanding of unspoken virtue. Equally, they openly exposed their skepticism about *emphasized disclosure*, which they deemed antithetical to their expected approach to creating benefits for local stakeholders. The findings illustrate how the normative and embedded tradition of CS not only continues to dominate in less scrutinized contexts, such as East Asia, but it also shows the main reasons why tensions with global standards emerge in these contexts. Hence, these findings provide a platform for additional conversations on the normative foundation of CS to understanding tensions and how global standards can be effectively managed in developing a business strategy that can allow for environmental and social change (Hahn et al., 2018; Shin, Vu, et al., 2021).

## 5.2 | CS managers' reactions as an outcome of corporate culture

This article advances the contextual literature on CS in Japan and Korea by providing a renewed understanding of the influence of corporate culture on how CS managers respond to their tensions when tasked with the strategic integration of global standards. More specifically, this article brings the level of the implementer into the analysis, which remains neglected in the literature on CS (Fontana, 2020; Shin, Vu, et al., 2021). Much CS literature in Japanese (Eweje & Sasaki, 2015; Goto & Sueyoshi, 2020; Nakamura, 2011) and Korean MNCs (Lee, 2007; Park et al., 2015) is centered on providing a macro-level outlook.

This article first puts the spotlight on the influence of Japanese MNCs' corporate culture, whose hierarchical foundation transpires through the staunch loyalty of CS managers. It falls in line with prior theorizing about the power structures in Japanese MNCs (Husted, 2015; Miles, 2006) and their defined social rules (Kumar et al., 2019). While striking a chord with Chikudate's (2015) argument about collective myopia in Japan, this article adds insight about how corporate culture in Japanese MNCs instills uniformity and acceptance also upon CS managers. Although the majority of the CS managers interviewed perceived global standards as an imposition from abroad (Fukukawa & Teramoto, 2009; Goto & Sueyoshi, 2020), they sidelined their tensions by justifying their MNC for introducing these standards. Through *managerial adhering*, for instance, the Japanese CS managers bury their skepticism and uncritically pursue the trajectory set forth by their top management. Still, through *professional detachment*, they rationalize the economic priorities of their MNC as an acceptable way of working, thereby relegating their personal aspirations to outside their job.

This article also depicts the influence of Korean MNCs' corporate culture on CS managers' reactions to the tensions from implementing global standards. Since Korean MNCs, as *chaebols*, were publicly accused for the 1997 financial crisis (Chang et al., 2017; Shin, 2016), they have reformulated not only CS by merging traditional philanthropic activities with global standards (Lee et al., 2009; Yang & Rhee, 2020) but also the corporate culture itself by embracing a more US system (Hemmer, 2020). Such change led CS managers in Korean MNCs to be more vocal to the hierarchy. By elucidating *soft activism*, for instance, this article depicts a growing number of Korean CS managers who expressed their contradictory position regarding global standards and associate them with commercial values. The soft activism of CS managers in Korean MNCs was made possible by the support they obtained from their informal social networks, where they share the same viewpoints outside their workplace and handle their tensions at work. The study shows how *extended networking*—largely stemming from the social tradition of *Yongo* (Horak & Taube, 2016; Horak & Yang, 2018)—helps Korean CS managers resist their MNC's approach to global standards and even change it.

By specifying the influence of corporate culture on CS managers' reactions to their tensions from implementing global standards in Japanese and Korean MNCs, this article offers important and

interrelated theoretical strands to study the variation of CS in these contexts. It embraces Sugita and Takahashi's (2015) point on the need for a cultural transformation in Japanese MNCs that must inevitably commence at the level of the top management. On the contrary, this study also adds to previous studies (Baek, 2018; Lee, 2007) by outlining that contestation could help Korean MNCs find more effective ways to meet triple bottom line objectives.

## 5.3 | Takeaways for the strategic planning of MNCs

The case of Japanese and Korean CS managers presented in this article offers important lessons for the strategic planning of MNCs going forward. These lessons are generalizable to MNCs, especially those headquartered in countries—in East Asia and beyond—characterized by a pre-existing and normative understanding of CS.

The pressures from global competition of the past years have led MNCs to strategically integrating global standards and reformulating their CS. Despite their individual differences, there is no doubt that global standards represent fundamental tools and contribute to tackle grand challenges, ranging from climate change to social inequality (Beschoner & Müller, 2007; Schouten et al., 2014; Wagner, 2020; Welch et al., 2002). This article however uncovers the danger of passively adopting global standards or, rather, adopting them with the main objective of showing engagement. Such a promotional approach may not only fuel societal-commercial tensions but may also undermine the opportunities for change of global standards in the eyes of CS managers, whose organizational role is particularly relevant in addressing grand challenges. As this article illustrates, CS managers may become alienated and disengaged to the extent of losing interest in their work. In other words, prioritizing the adoption and promotion of global standards while focusing on external recognition can backfire and put the validity of CS managers' work at risk. In order to cater to the interests of environmental and social stakeholders, maintain CS managers' motivation, and ultimately foster change, top MNC managers can plan to strategically integrate global standards and reformulate CS more effectively. They can do it in different ways.

First, top MNC managers may need to show more commitment in their organization to CS as a normative element of business strategy top-down. This means integrating CS in the long-term strategic planning of their MNC and demonstrating a sincere commitment to CS, beyond marketing, to the rest of their organization. This does not mean neglecting bottom line objectives or dismissing the importance of reporting about global standards. However, it involves measuring how their MNC can make a more meaningful impact to address grand challenges—such as through specific United Nations Sustainable Development Goals—rather than insisting on achieving status in CS rankings, such as the Dow Jones Sustainability Index.

Second, top MNC managers may need to put global standards in context. This means planning for the strategic selection and integration of global standards that can provide measurable benefits for internal as well as external stakeholders at the local level. Internally,



this may require addressing important issues such as discriminatory behaviors at work—whether based on gender, race, creed or physical condition—as human rights violations. Hence, it requires top MNCs managers to take strong actions that can inspire a culture of diversity and inclusion in the future. Likewise, adopting global standards can help external stakeholders. More contextual contributions for external stakeholders—ranging from spending against environmental degradation or supporting disenfranchised communities in local areas—can be equally effective in providing concrete support to those in need at the local level.

Third, top MNC managers might have to plan strategically to ensure that CS managers can have a more participatory role in their work by increasing their authority. CS managers are often unable to implement bold changes that affect the rest of the organization because they lack authority and, as a consequence, their voice remains unheard. Hence, CS managers need to be able to be represented at the executive level by “a champion,” such as for instance a vice-president from the CS department. Furthermore, CS managers need to have the opportunity to have broader responsibilities from reporting about global standards to actively working on the implementation of global standards on the field. CS managers need to have a more active role vis-a-vis stakeholders, including growing a wider understanding of environmental and social needs and how these can be addressed.

Such strategic planning can have a number of benefits for CS managers and, subsequently, in addressing grand challenges. It can foster the understanding and acceptance of global standards among CS managers. This may help CS managers perceive less tensions over time and increase their willingness to learn more, not just as part of their job but also as part of their own commitment to environmental and social causes. It can help form a more satisfied, more engaged, and more aware body of CS managers who might see their work not as a job but as an opportunity to express their personal aspirations and find meaningfulness. Although such strategic planning will require substantial and prolonged efforts, it will be exceptionally needed for MNCs to integrate a more balanced formulation of CS into business strategy that can more easily address the interests of environmental and social stakeholders and address grand challenges.

## 5.4 | Limitations and avenues for future research

This article has a number of limitations and offers key avenues for future research. This article drew its evidence exclusively on CS managers. Whether from Japanese (Eweje & Sasaki, 2015) or Korean MNCs (Park et al., 2015), the importance attributed to CS managers was justified by their direct involvement in implementing global standards (Hahn et al., 2010; Hahn et al., 2015). Consequently, this article excludes the potential tensions of managers covering other corporate functions—HR managers, compliance managers, C-suite managers—or executives whose everyday work might still require them to somewhat consider global standards. Including these perspectives might

provide a broader spectrum to better understand the nature of the tensions associated with global standards, including determining how professionals employed in different corporate jobs might react to these tensions.

Another limitation comes from the exclusive focus of this research on MNCs. The study intentionally selected MNCs because they are often expected to “act as change agents” (Mun & Jung, 2018:412) and have a vested interest to meet the needs of their environmental and social stakeholders to be able to compete in the international market (Chang et al., 2017). By narrowing down the scope to MNCs, this study omitted the possible tensions of CS managers working in small and medium enterprises, in companies operating within national boundaries and in local subsidiaries of foreign MNCs that might invest in global standards. Conducting a similar study on CS managers in different corporate structures might contribute to future CS research by helping convey a more exhaustive overview of how CS managers experience and react to tensions.

Finally, this research was undertaken in Japanese and Korean MNCs. These settings in East Asia are particularly relevant because of their highly comparable governance style, geographical closeness (Steers & Shim, 2020), and normative tradition of CS (Kim et al., 2004; Wagner-Tsukamoto, 2009). Future research would benefit from replicating this study with CS managers working in MNCs from other Asian settings, such as South East Asia, South Asia, or even West Asia. In comparison with the CS managers from Japanese and Korean MNCs, these CS managers might be subject to dichotomous but also similar influences that shape how they perceive and react to global standards, thereby offering a novel glimpse and more granular understanding about tensions in the Asian continent.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Enrico Fontana and Hyemi Shin are particularly indebted to Andreas Rasche (Copenhagen Business School), Friederike Döbbe (Stockholm School of Economics), and Rachelle Belinga (Drew University) for their very helpful suggestions during the online “Work-in-Progress” seminar organized by the Mistra Centre for Sustainable Markets in November 2020. Enrico Fontana would also like to thank the European Institute for Japanese Studies (Stockholm School of Economics, Sweden) and the Centre for Social and Sustainable Innovation (CSSI) (Gustavson School of Business, University of Victoria, British Columbia, Canada) for supporting this research. CSSI receives funding from Newmont Goldcorp Inc.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

We the authors confirm that there are no financial and personal relationships with other people or organizations that could have inappropriately influenced our work. We the authors also confirm that the paper does not include any conflict of interest and each manager interviewed volunteered to disclose their knowledge.

## FUNDING INFORMATION

We authors confirm that we did not receive any funding for this project.

## ORCID

Enrico Fontana  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1662-7222>

Hyemi Shin  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1671-4054>

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> During the interviews, the CS managers discussed global standards as environmental standards (e.g., ISO 14001), social standards (e.g., ISO 26000) or policies of international CS indexes (e.g., United Nations Global Compact and Dow Jones Sustainability Index). At times, however, they discussed global standards in more general terms. In those occasions, we have highlighted in the text that the CS managers discussed the general context of global standards.

<sup>2</sup> Although human rights in this article have been treated as part of the social dimension of CS, the CS manager at JMNC-W indicates the ambiguity attached to the meaning of human rights in Japan. This ambiguity was confirmed by the interviews with many other CS managers in Japanese MNCs, who labeled it as a “Western concept.” As Neary (2003:35) postulates, Japan has since World War Two “participated in the bodies dealing with human rights issues only reluctantly and tended to respond defensively to proposals it considered at variance with Japanese law or practice.” Neary goes on to explain that such reluctance “was in part a result of Japan following the US lead in human rights policy as in most other areas of foreign policy.” Therefore, it is appropriate to believe that Japan's reluctance to accept the international framing of human rights, often interpreted as an interference from abroad in domestic matters, has influenced the perception of human rights at the level of its general population. Although Japan has increased its openness towards the international human rights regime after the first Gulf War—“a time of change in the governmental commitments to internationally decided human rights values” (Neary, 2003:52)—the claims of the CS manager at JMNC-W as well as the other CS managers interviewed show that much confusion on the meaning of human rights in Japan continues to exist. We are grateful to one of the reviewers for pointing out the need to elaborate on the importance of human rights in Japan.

## REFERENCES

- Aguinis, H. (2011). Organizational responsibility: Doing good and doing well. In S. Zedeck (Ed.), *APA Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology: Maintaining, Expanding, and Contracting the Organization* (pp. 855–879). American Psychological Association Books. <https://doi.org/10.1037/12171-024>
- Baek, K. (2018). Sustainable development and pollutant outcomes: The case of ISO 14001 in Korea. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, 25(5), 825–832. <https://doi.org/10.1002/csr.1498>
- Bansal, P. (2003). From issues to actions: The importance of individual concerns and organizational values in responding to natural environmental issues. *Organization Science*, 14(5), 510–527. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.14.5.510.16765>
- Beschorner, T., & Müller, M. (2007). Social standards: Toward an active ethical involvement of businesses in developing countries. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 73(1), 11–20. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-006-9193-3>
- Boardman, C. M., & Kato, H. K. (2003). The Confucian roots of business Kyosei. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 48(4), 317–333. <https://doi.org/10.1023/B:BUSI.0000005799.31770.57>
- Carroll, A. B. (2021). Corporate social responsibility: Perspectives on the CSR construct's development and future. *Business & Society*, 60(6), 1258–1278. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00076503211001765>
- Chang, S. J. (2003). *Financial crisis and transformation of Korean business groups: The rise and fall of chaebols*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511510861>
- Chang, Y. K., Oh, W. Y., Park, J. H., & Jang, M. G. (2017). Exploring the relationship between board characteristics and CSR: Empirical evidence from Korea. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 140(2), 225–242. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-015-2651-z>
- Chapple, W., & Moon, J. (2005). Corporate social responsibility (CSR) in Asia. A seven-country study of CSR web site reporting. *Business & Society*, 44(4), 415–441. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0007650305281658>
- Chikudate, N. (2009). Collective hyperopia and dualistic natures of corporate social responsibility in Japanese companies. *Asian Business & Management*, 8(2), 169–184. <https://doi.org/10.1057/abm.2009.4>
- Chikudate, N. (2015). *Collective Myopia in Japanese Organizations: A Transcultural Approach for Identifying Corporate Meltdowns*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137450852>
- Choi, H., & Yi, D. (2018). Environmental innovation inertia: Analyzing the business circumstances for environmental process and product innovations. *Business Strategy and the Environment*, 27(8), 1623–1634. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.2228>
- Corbin, J. M., & Strauss, A. L. (2008). *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*. Sage. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452230153>
- Cormier, D., & Magnan, M. (2015). The economic relevance of environmental disclosure and its impact on corporate legitimacy: An empirical investigation. *Business Strategy and the Environment*, 24(6), 431–450. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.1829>
- Dunne, D. D., & Dougherty, D. (2016). Abductive reasoning: How innovators navigate in the labyrinth of complex product innovation. *Organization Studies*, 37(2), 131–159. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840615604501>
- Endo, K. (2020). Corporate governance beyond the shareholder–stakeholder dichotomy: Lessons from Japanese corporations' environmental performance. *Business Strategy and the Environment*, 29(4), 1625–1633. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.2457>
- Engert, S., Rauter, R., & Baumgartner, R. J. (2016). Exploring the integration of corporate sustainability into strategic management: A literature review. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 112, 2833–2850. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2015.08.031>
- Epstein, M. J., Buhovac, A. R., & Yuthas, K. (2015). Managing social, environmental and financial performance simultaneously. *Long Range Planning*, 48(1), 35–45. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lrp.2012.11.001>
- Eweje, G., & Sasaki, M. (2015). CSR in Japanese companies: Perspectives from managers. *Business Strategy and the Environment*, 24(7), 678–687. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.1894>
- Feix, A., & Philippe, D. (2018). Unpacking the narrative decontestation of CSR: Aspiration for change or defense of the status quo? *Business & Society*, 59(1), 129–174. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0007650318816434>
- Fontana, E. (2020). When the main job tasks are perceived to be ‘irrelevant’ in the workplace: The internal uselessness of corporate social responsibility work in Japan. *Culture and Organization*, 26(5–6), 405–424. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14759551.2019.1656632>
- Froese, F. J. (2020). Korean management: Quo vadis? *Asian Business & Management*, 19(2), 145–146. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41291-020-00110-6>
- Fujii, H., Iwata, K., Kaneko, S., & Managi, S. (2013). Corporate environmental and economic performance of Japanese manufacturing firms: Empirical study for sustainable development. *Business Strategy and the Environment*, 22(3), 187–201. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.1747>
- Fukukawa, K., & Moon, J. (2004). A Japanese model of corporate social responsibility. *Journal of Corporate Citizenship*, 2004(16), 45–59. <https://doi.org/10.9774/GLEAF.4700.2004.wi.00008>
- Fukukawa, K., & Teramoto, Y. (2009). Understanding Japanese CSR: The reflections of managers in the field of global operations. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 85(1), 133–146. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-008-9933-7>

- Gao, J., & Bansal, P. (2013). Instrumental and integrative logics in business sustainability. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 112(2), 241–255. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-012-1245-2>
- Goto, M., & Sueyoshi, T. (2020). Sustainable development and corporate social responsibility in Japanese manufacturing companies. *Sustainable Development*, 28(4), 844–856. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.2035>
- Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods*, 18(1), 59–82.
- Hahn, T., Figge, F., Pinkse, J., & Preuss, L. (2010). Trade-offs in corporate sustainability: You can't have your cake and eat it. *Business Strategy and the Environment*, 19(4), 217–229. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.674>
- Hahn, T., Figge, F., Pinkse, J., & Preuss, L. (2018). A paradox perspective on corporate sustainability: Descriptive, instrumental, and normative aspects. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 148(2), 235–248. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-017-3587-2>
- Hahn, T., Pinkse, J., Preuss, L., & Figge, F. (2015). Tensions in corporate sustainability: Towards an integrative framework. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 127(2), 297–316. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-014-2047-5>
- Hahn, T., Preuss, L., Pinkse, J., & Figge, F. (2014). Cognitive frames in corporate sustainability: Managerial sensemaking with paradoxical and business case frames. *Academy of Management Review*, 39(4), 463–487. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2012.0341>
- Hemmert, M. (2020). Does Korean-style management have a future? *Asian Business & Management*, 19(2), 147–170. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41291-019-00062-6>
- Hengst, I. A., Jarzabkowski, P., Hoegl, M., & Muethel, M. (2020). Toward a process theory of making sustainability strategies legitimate in action. *Academy of Management Journal*, 63(1), 246–271. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2016.0960>
- Hoffmann, J. (2018). Talking into (non)existence: Denying or constituting paradoxes of corporate social responsibility. *Human Relations*, 71(5), 668–691. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726717721306>
- Horak, S., & Taube, M. (2016). Same but different? Similarities and fundamental differences of informal social networks in China (guanxi) and Korea (yongo). *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, 33(3), 595–616. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10490-015-9452-x>
- Horak, S., & Yang, I. (2018). A complementary perspective on business ethics in South Korea: Civil religion, common misconceptions, and overlooked social structures. *Business Ethics: A European Review*, 27(1), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1111/beer.12153>
- Hörisch, J., Wulfsberg, I., & Schaltegger, S. (2020). The influence of feedback and awareness of consequences on the development of corporate sustainability action over time. *Business Strategy and the Environment*, 29(2), 638–650. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.2394>
- Hosoda, M., & Suzuki, K. (2015). Using management control systems to implement CSR activities: An empirical analysis of 12 Japanese companies. *Business Strategy and the Environment*, 24(7), 628–642. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.1896>
- Husted, B. W. (2015). Corporate social responsibility practice from 1800–1914: Past initiatives and current debates. *Business Ethics Quarterly*, 25(1), 125–141. <https://doi.org/10.1017/beq.2014.1>
- Kim, C. H., Amaeshi, K. M., Harris, S., & Suh, C. J. (2013). CSR and the national institutional context: The case of South Korea. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(12), 2581–2591. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2012.05.015>
- Kim, H., Hoskisson, R. E., Tihanyi, L., & Hong, J. (2004). The evolution and restructuring of diversified business groups in emerging markets: The lessons from Chaebols in Korea. *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, 21(1), 25–48. <https://doi.org/10.1023/B:APJM.0000024076.86696.d5>
- Kim, Y., & Kim, S. Y. (2010). The influence of cultural values on perceptions of corporate social responsibility: Application of Hofstede's dimensions to Korean public relations practitioners. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 91(4), 485–500. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-009-0095-z>
- Kobayashi, K., Eweje, G., & Tappin, D. (2018). Employee wellbeing and human sustainability: Perspectives of managers in large Japanese corporations. *Business Strategy and the Environment*, 27(7), 801–810. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.2032>
- Kumar, K., Boesso, G., Batra, R., & Yao, J. (2019). Explicit and implicit corporate social responsibility: Differences in the approach to stakeholder engagement activities of U.S. and Japanese companies. *Business Strategy and the Environment*, 28(6), 1121–1130. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.2306>
- Lee, H., Park, T., Moon, H. K., Yang, Y., & Kim, C. (2009). Corporate philanthropy, attitude towards corporations, and purchase intentions: A South Korea study. *Journal of Business Research*, 62(10), 939–946. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2008.08.007>
- Lee, K. H. (2007). Corporate social responsiveness in the Korean electronics industry. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, 14(4), 219–230. <https://doi.org/10.1002/csr.163>
- Lee, K. H., Cin, B. C., & Lee, E. Y. (2016). Environmental responsibility and firm performance: The application of an environmental, social and governance model. *Business Strategy and the Environment*, 25(1), 40–53. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.1855>
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry* (Vol. 9, pp. 438–439). Sage Publications. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767\(85\)90062-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767(85)90062-8)
- Margolis, J. D., & Walsh, J. P. (2003). Misery loves companies: Rethinking social initiatives by business. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 48(2), 268–305. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3556659>
- Miles, L. (2006). The application of Anglo-American corporate practices in societies influenced by Confucian values. *Business & Society Review*, 111(3), 305–312. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8594.2006.00274.x>
- Miles, L., & Goo, S. H. (2013). Corporate governance in Asian countries: Has Confucianism anything to offer? *Business & Society Review*, 118(1), 23–45. <https://doi.org/10.1111/basr.12001>
- Mun, E., & Jung, J. (2018). Change above the glass ceiling: Corporate social responsibility and gender diversity in Japanese firms. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 63(2), 409–440. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0001839217712920>
- Nakamura, M. (2011). Adoption and policy implications of Japan's new corporate governance practices after the reform. *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, 28(1), 187–213. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10490-010-9230-8>
- Nearly, I. (2003). *Human rights in Japan, South Korea and Taiwan*. Routledge.
- Nishitani, K., & Kokubu, K. (2012). Why does the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions enhance firm value? The case of Japanese manufacturing firms. *Business Strategy and the Environment*, 21(8), 517–529. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.734>
- Nwoba, A. C., Boso, N., & Robson, M. J. (2021). Corporate sustainability strategies in institutional adversity: Antecedent, outcome, and contingency effects. *Business Strategy and the Environment*, 30(2), 787–807. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.2654>
- Paik, Y., Lee, J. M., & Pak, Y. S. (2019). Convergence in international business ethics? A comparative study of ethical philosophies, thinking style, and ethical decision-making between US and Korean managers. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 156(3), 839–855. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-017-3629-9>
- Park, G., & Park, H. S. (2016). Corporate social responsibility in Korea: How to communicate global issues to local stakeholders. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, 23(2), 77–87. <https://doi.org/10.1002/csr.1362>
- Park, S. B. (2018). Multinationals and sustainable development: Does internationalization develop corporate sustainability of emerging market multinationals? *Business Strategy and the Environment*, 27(8), 1514–1524. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.2209>

- Park, Y. R., Song, S., Choe, S., & Baik, Y. (2015). Corporate social responsibility in international business: Illustrations from Korean and Japanese electronics MNEs in Indonesia. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 129(3), 747–761. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-014-2212-x>
- Pinkse, J., Hahn, T., & Figge, F. (2019). Tensions and slim responses? The discursive construction of strategic tensions around social issues. *Academy of Management Discoveries*, 5(3), 314–340. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amd.2018.0150>
- Pratt, M. G., Kaplan, S., & Whittington, R. (2020). The tumult over transparency: Decoupling transparency from replication in establishing trustworthy qualitative research\*. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 65(1), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0001839219887663>
- Randall, D. M., & Fernandes, M. F. (1991). The social desirability response bias in ethics research. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 10(11), 805–817. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00383696>
- Rhee, S. K., & Lee, S. Y. (2003). Dynamic change of corporate environmental strategy: Rhetoric and reality. *Business Strategy and the Environment*, 12(3), 175–190. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.356>
- Sætre, A. S., & van de Ven, A. H. (2021). Generating theory by abduction. *Academy of Management Review*. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2019.0233>
- Schouten, G., Vellema, S., & van Wijk, J. (2014). Multinational enterprises and sustainability standards: Using a partnering-intensity continuum to classify their interactions. In A. Verbeke, R. van Tulder, & R. Strange (Eds.), *International Business and Sustainable Development* (Vol. 8) (pp. 117–139). Emerald Group Publishing Limited. [https://doi.org/10.1108/S1745-8862\(2013\)000008011](https://doi.org/10.1108/S1745-8862(2013)000008011)
- Sharma, G., & Jaiswal, A. K. (2018). Unsustainability of sustainability: Cognitive frames and tensions in bottom of the pyramid projects. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 148(2), 291–307. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-017-3584-5>
- Shin, H. (2016). The dynamics of the South Korean national business system and the changing spirit of CSR. *Academy of Management Proceedings*, 1, 12951. <https://doi.org/10.5465/ambpp.2016.12951abstract>
- Shin, H., Cho, C., Lecomte, M., & Gond, J. P. (2021). The moral relationality of professionalism discourses: The case of corporate social responsibility practitioners in South Korea. *Business & Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00076503211018666>
- Shin, H., Vu, M. C., & Burton, N. (2021). Micro-processes of moral normative engagement with CSR tensions: The role of spirituality in justification work. *Journal of Business Ethics*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-021-04853-w>
- Sitaloppi, J., Rajala, R., & Hietala, H. (2020). Integrating CSR with business strategy: A tension management perspective. *Journal of Business Ethics*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-020-04569-3>
- Slawinski, N., & Bansal, P. (2012). A matter of time: The temporal perspectives of organizational responses to climate change. *Organization Studies*, 33(11), 1537–1563. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840612463319>
- Slawinski, N., & Bansal, P. (2015). Short on time: Intertemporal tensions in business sustainability. *Organization Science*, 26(2), 531–549. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2014.0960>
- Smith, W. K., Gonin, M., & Besharov, M. L. (2013). Managing social-business tensions: A review and research agenda for social enterprises. *Business Ethics Quarterly*, 23(3), 407–442. <https://doi.org/10.5840/beq201323327>
- Smith, W. K., & Lewis, M. W. (2011). Toward a theory of paradox: A dynamic equilibrium model of organizing. *Academy of Management Review*, 36(2), 381–403.
- Steers, R. M., & Shim, W. S. (2020). Korean-style leadership: A comparative perspective. *Asian Business & Management*, 19(2), 175–178. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41291-020-00108-0>
- Suddaby, R., Saxton, G. D., & Gunz, S. (2015). Twittering change: The institutional work of domain change in accounting expertise. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, 45, 52–68. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aos.2015.07.002>
- Sugita, M., & Takahashi, T. (2015). Influence of corporate culture on environmental management performance: An empirical study of Japanese firms. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, 22(3), 182–192. <https://doi.org/10.1002/csr.1346>
- Tanimoto, K. (2017). The implementation of CSR management and stakeholder relations in Japan. In S. O. Idowu & S. Vertigans (Eds.), *Stages of Corporate Social Responsibility* (pp. 223–241). Springer International Publishing. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-43536-7\\_11](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-43536-7_11)
- Todeschini, M. M. (2011). “Webs of engagement”: Managerial responsibility in a Japanese company. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 101(1), 45–59. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-011-1177-2>
- van Bommel, K. (2018). Managing tensions in sustainable business models: Exploring instrumental and integrative strategies. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 196, 829–841. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2018.06.063>
- Van der Byl, C. A., & Slawinski, N. (2015). Embracing tensions in corporate sustainability: A review of research from win-wins and trade-offs to paradoxes and beyond. *Organization & Environment*, 28(1), 54–79. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1086026615575047>
- Visser, W. (2010). The age of responsibility: CSR 2.0 and the new DNA of business. *Journal of Business Systems, Governance and Ethics*, 5(3), 7–22.
- Wagner, M. (2020). Global governance in new public environmental management: An international and intertemporal comparison of voluntary standards' impacts. *Business Strategy and the Environment*, 29(3), 1056–1073. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.2417>
- Wagner-Tsukamoto, S. (2009). Consumer ethics in Japan: An economic reconstruction of moral agency of Japanese firms—Qualitative insights from grocery/retail markets. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 84(1), 29–44. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-008-9671-x>
- Welch, E. W., Mori, Y., & Aoyagi-Usui, M. (2002). Voluntary adoption of ISO 14001 in Japan: Mechanisms, stages and effects. *Business Strategy and the Environment*, 11(1), 43–62. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.318>
- Woo, C., Chun, Y., Chun, D., Han, S., & Lee, D. (2014). Impact of green innovation on labor productivity and its determinants: An analysis of the Korean manufacturing industry. *Business Strategy and the Environment*, 23(8), 567–576. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.1807>
- Yang, J., & Rhee, H. (2020). CSR disclosure against boycotts: Evidence from Korea. *Asian Business & Management*, 19(3), 311–343. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41291-019-00063-5>
- Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Sage Publications.
- Yoo, S., & Lee, S. M. (1987). Management style and practice of Korean Chaebols. *California Management Review*, 29(4), 95–110. <https://doi.org/10.2307/41162133>

**How to cite this article:** Fontana, E., Shin, H., Oka, C., & Gamble, J. (2021). Tensions in the strategic integration of corporate sustainability through global standards: Evidence from Japan and South Korea. *Business Strategy and the Environment*, 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.2923>