

Call for Papers
Corporate Governance: An International Review

Special Issue on

**“Chief Executive Officers With A Cause?
CEO Activism And Firms’ Governance, Strategy, And Performance”**

Special Issue Submission Deadline: September 30, 2024
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BACKGROUND

The fortunes of firms are said to depend on their chief executive officers (CEOs). The last ten years have witnessed the emergence of an intriguing new phenomenon that is consequential for the governance, strategy, and performance of firms – CEO sociopolitical activism, or more simply, CEO activism. The phenomenon does not resonate well with the traditional models and understanding of the substance and boundaries of a CEO’s role. Described as the taking of public stances on socio-economic and socio-political issues that often do not have an evident relationship with the business of a company, CEO activism is mushrooming and may have implications beyond firms for the broader society (Chatterjee & Toffel, 2018; Hambrick & Wowak, 2021; Hersh, 2023; Krause & Miller, 2020). Whereas in the past, CEOs avoided becoming involved in contentious societal debates, lest it may antagonize internal and external stakeholders, this is not the case anymore. From capital-intensive manufacturing concerns, through consumer-goods companies, fashion houses, and social-media enterprises, to financial services and investment firms, CEOs in diverse sectors have become vocal proponents of social causes, boldly going where corporate leaders had not gone before (Branicki et al., 2021; Chatterjee & Toffel, 2019; Rumstadt & Kanbach, 2022).

CEO activism has a society-oriented aspect to it that puts CEOs outside their conventional role as either the agents or stewards of companies, who, while reporting to a board of directors, manage the operations and resources of a company on behalf of its owners and stakeholders (Cannella & Monroe, 1997; Finkelstein et al., 2009; Georgakakis et al., 2022; Shi & Hoskisson, 2021). Increasingly, nowadays, CEOs conduct themselves as if they were also the representatives of society, using their position and status to bring about change for the sake of a greater good, for example, climate and racial justice in the world (Rizzi, 2021; Shandwick & KRC Research, 2018; Wolfe, 2019). As scholars begin to take note of CEO activism and to explore its nature and features (Chatterjee & Toffel, 2018; Rumstadt & Kanbach, 2022), the need for a coherent and concerted examination of the various drivers and implications of CEO activism has become apparent for building a robust body of theoretical and empirical knowledge on the subject. There are many unknowns about CEO activism, including its relationship with the broader current climate of activism (Eilert & Nappier Cherup, 2020; Shi et al., 2022) and the civic and institutional desire for cultural change to address the grand challenges humanity faces (George et al., 2016; Wickert et al., 2021).

It is conceivable that CEO activism reflects an expansion in CEOs' understanding of their job, role, and responsibilities as the view takes hold that the purpose of firms is to pursue both economic and social goals (Gartenberg & Serafeim, 2019; Glamboosky et al., 2023; Henderson, 2021). Alternatively, CEO activism may be an instrument for private and corporate gain in a landscape of changing norms and values. For example, political beliefs and personality traits (Kalogeraki & Georgakakis, 2022; Narayan et al., 2021) may motivate CEO activism as a vehicle to attract attention and gain admiration rather than to achieve a social goal (Arena et al., 2018; Tang et al., 2018). As well, how do the identities and experiences of CEOs, as shaped by their education, ethnicity, gender, and generational cohort membership relate to the issues CEOs take a public stance on and the passion with which they do it? In this context, we do not know much about how the motivators of CEO activism interact with CEO characteristics to affect the focus, frequency, and vividness of CEO activism (Hambrick & Wowak, 2021; Wowak et al., 2022). The literature is also silent on how CEO activism relates to variables at the organization (for, e.g., commitment to CSR and corporate reputation) and industry (for, e.g., industry legitimacy and intensity of competition) levels.

In addition, given the growing power of institutional investors and their involvement in politics (DesJardine et al., 2023; McNulty & Nordberg, 2016), could it be that CEOs engage in activism to mitigate pressure from their investors? Research on corporate political activity (Hadani et al., 2015; Shi et al., 2021) also hints at the possibility that CEO activism may be an effort to complement donations, lobbying, and other nonmarket strategies to orchestrate a favorable policy environment. In contrast, nascent research on corporate wokeism (Fan, 2019; Wright, 2022) indicates that CEO activism may be driven by a desire to ingratiate oneself with the promoters and adherents of initiatives and movements associated with a liberal progressive ideology (Vredenburg et al., 2021; Rizzi, 2021), although this may alienate customers and investors espousing a different ideology (Burbano, 2021; Kauffman, 2021). A further gap in the literature concerns the relationship between CEO activism and corporate boards. While one expects vigilant boards to keep an eye on CEO activism (see Bedendo & Siming, 2021; Hou & Poliquin, 2022), we do not have much insight into how boards deal or should deal with CEO activism (see Larcker et al., 2018). Overall, the interplays between CEO activism and firm's governance, strategies, and performance await systematic investigation.

AIMS AND SCOPE

The objective of this special issue is to advance our understanding of CEO activism and its antecedents and consequences. We therefore invite papers that examine the theoretical domain and measurement of CEO activism, the factors at the individual, board, company, and industry levels that affect the substance and style of CEO activism, and the effects of CEO activism on the governance and strategies of firms and the pursuit and attainment of financial and social goals. We invite theory building and theory testing papers and we are open to the use of any theoretical lens and methodological approach. We identify below a set of themes and indicative issues and questions that fall within the aims and scope of the special issue. This set is by no means intended to suggest an exhaustive list and we encourage submissions centering on themes and issues that may not be listed below:

- How should we theorize CEO activism? While it may signify an innately driven expression of moral values by CEOs whose cognition about their role has progressed to encompass the leading of social change, it could also represent

behavioral conditioning and the seizing of performative opportunities as social mores and expectations change.

- Do we need typologies and taxonomies to advance our knowledge of CEO activism? Furthermore, how should we develop reliable and valid measures to enable theory testing and knowledge aggregation?
- With reference to CEO personality, do variables such as charisma, hubris, narcissism, and risk aversion predict the issues CEOs take an explicit stance on? Do they regulate the endurance, intensity, and scope of CEO activism?
- Do CEO age, ethnicity, gender, and founder status affect CEO activism? At the firm level, how do the expectations of different internal (e.g., employees and shareholders) and external (e.g., customers and suppliers) stakeholders matter? At the industry level, what is the influence of factors such as regulations and level of dynamism?
- Regarding the interplay between CEO activism and corporate governance. Do factors, such as, CEO – board-chair relationship, board independence, activist board members, and board directors' external affiliations matter for CEO activism?
- What influence does external governance emanating from competitors, creditors, institutional investors, media, and rating agencies have on CEO activism?
- Empirical work shows a negative effect of CEO activism on shareholder value. However, are there circumstances when it may affect a firm's market performance positively?
- Are there organizationally relevant differences between conservative-leaning and liberal-leaning CEO activism? Does board members' partisanship shape CEOs' willingness to engage in activism of a particular kind?
- How does CEO activism affect social dynamics? While it may have a contagion effect on other executives and employees, its value-laden nature could surface internal tensions and fault-lines, resulting in polarization and the influencing of the strategic decision-making process and strategy implementation.
- Research hints that CEO activism can affect customers' and employees' identification with a company. It may have further effects on other stakeholder groups (e.g., financial activism by investors). Also, how does it affect image and legitimacy, and thus a firm's ability to attract resources (e.g., media coverage and financial analysts' attention)?

- Inasmuch as CEO activism may affect internal dynamics in a company and the perceptions of important external stakeholders, what is its impact on organizational attention, search, learning, and innovation, and hence financial performance?
- As a symbolic action, CEO activism may aim to influence public perception and the policy sphere. But does it also influence substantive actions pertaining to, for instance, the allocation of resources to CSR initiatives, ESG/sustainability reporting practices, engagement with the U.N.'s sustainable development goals, and corporate purpose?
- How is CEO activism affecting society, and with what implications for firms, corporate governance, and competitive dynamics?

SUBMISSION TIMELINE AND PROCESS

The deadline for the submission of full papers to the Special Issue (SI) is September 30, 2024. The SI is expected to be published in 2026. Manuscripts should be prepared using the CGIR Author Guidelines and must be uploaded using the CGIR Manuscript Central website (<https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/cgir>). All manuscripts will be reviewed according to the CGIR standard double-blind review process.

Preceding the SI submission deadline, we have planned a Paper Development Workshop (PDW) on June 3 – 4, 2024. We ask prospective contributors to the SI to consider participating in the PDW. To do so, please submit a short paper that presents the main aspects of the full paper you aim to submit for possible publication in the SI. The short paper should lay out clearly how your research is linked to the aims and scope of the SI, the literature that informs your conceptual framework, the methods (including completed and planned empirical work) and analysis, and the expected contributions. The short paper should be about 3,000 words (including references and appendices), and should be submitted by 17.00 GMT, April 15, 2024 by sending an email to CEO.Activism.PDW@leeds.ac.uk. Acceptance of the most promising short papers will be notified by April 30, 2024.

The PDW, which will be held at the Leeds University Business School (LUBS), University of Leeds, UK, affords an opportunity to receive feedback on your research-in-progress from the guest editors of the special issue, the CGIR editors, assigned

discussants, and other participants. The PDW will also feature a keynote address and a panel discussion that bring together eminent scholars and practitioners. Acceptance of a short paper at the PDW does not however guarantee the publication of a full paper in the special issue, nor will submissions to the special issue be limited to the short papers presented at the PDW. There is no fee for participation in the PDW, and LUBS will provide light refreshments and lunches to participants free of charge.

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