CORPORATE GOVERNANCE: DISCOVERING THE NEW RESEARCH HORIZONS

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The global reduction in individual or retail ownership of stocks toward a movement to more institutional ownership has had many effects on the financial markets, stock prices, and corporate structure over time (Hogan & Olson, 2019). According to Blume and Keim (2017), since 2010 over 65% of the average publicly traded firms are now owned by institutional investors. Institutional ownership in turn has highlighted the need and brought about a higher impetus for companies to subscribe to areas of importance in stakeholder theory that may not have been of high priority in a firm's former corporate governance agenda. While previous boards would have concentrated more on profitability and share price, modern corporate boards also need to focus on demonstrating the firm's ability to practice good corporate citizenship with sound financial and corporate governance practices.

Modern corporate governance is indeed a dynamic and changing set of guidelines, practices, and procedures that are used to steer and manage a company forward. Factors that are inherent in today's discussions of corporate governance deviate, sometimes dramatically, from those emphasized just a few decades ago. Even historical corporate titans who still dominate their respective industries have most likely evolved with dramatic changes to their corporate governance policies and structure. While no standard set of global copacetic corporate governance policies exists for all circumstances, there is a growing set of themes that do resonate with most companies, their investors, and their stakeholders around the world.

One of the driving forces of corporate governance is a company's board. Modern corporate boards have seen changes in terms of gender, size, diversity, composition, risk management techniques, digital and cyber savviness, environmental and sustainability governance, accountability, transparency, and ethical business practices (Adams & Ferreira, 2009; Eklund, Palmberg, & Wiberg, 2009; Chin, Vos, & Casey, 2004; Davidson & Rowe, 2004; Carter, Simkins, & Simpson, 2003; Shahzad, Rehman, Colombage, & Nawaz, 2019; Água & Correia, 2021; Aminadav & Papaioannou, 2020). A high level of corporate governance brings about transparency and this transparency allows a company's shareholders, management, and board to have aligned incentives. A few incentives that currently resonate globally as high priority are environmental and sustainable governance (ESG) and diversity at both the board and company levels.

ESG is a major evolving component in the modern corporate governance area (Cotter & Najah, 2012; Abdel-Meguid, Dahawy, & Shehata, 2021; Grove & Clouse, 2021; Ankier, 2020). ESG is no longer looked at as a siloed approach but has more recently been combined in companies' overall strategic, operational, and financial scenarios. Companies, their investors, and their stakeholders are interested in the evolving components in areas of ESG and diversity that historically were not major concerns from a financial perspective. Firms are also now judged in the marketplace for their ethical status among their peers. Research has shown that environmental areas such as deforestation, climate change, waste and pollution, and resource depletion are all areas of concern for stakeholders and investors. The social status of the company as it relates to employee working conditions, child labor, community involvement, employee development, and diversity are all key factors that set a company apart from its competitors and build upon its reputation in the corporate world. Additionally, governance areas such as executive pay, corruption, political donations and associated affiliations, board composition including its diversity and structure, and tax strategy also now play a pivotal role in building trust among a companies' many stakeholders, which in turn helps promote shareholder value (Mirone, Sancetta, Sardanelli, & Mele, 2021; Tsene, 2021; El Beshlawy & Ardroumli, 2021; Otman, 2019; Kyereboah-Coleman & Biekpe, 2006). Increased shareholder value then makes a company an excellent long-term investment for both institutional and retail investors alike.

In the future, academic research should focus on the areas mentioned above and other related issues. Companies are being held to a higher standard than their predecessors and will necessarily then need to be focused on challenges that are currently known and evolving, along with others that researchers and corporate directors could only at present dream about. Items like cyber and digital readiness are showing, for example, how formerly unknown threats like ransomware can not only sidetrack a company in the short run but can put them out of business just as quickly. Cryptocurrency and blockchain will no doubt also play a role in corporate governance in ways that we can now only speculate. Corporate boards will need to be efficient and malleable in order to adjust and change as needed to these increasing demands. Researchers will need to be there to help direct those resources to areas that provide value. Ironically, the growing complexity of the corporate governance structure will be a boom for academic research. It underscores the exponential growth in research possibilities now open to investigators that previously would not have been part of a corporate governance agenda.

These new-found fields mentioned above will sow the research agendas for the future of corporate governance. To that end, the papers presented at the international online conference, "*Corporate Governance: Fundamental and Challenging Issues in Scholarly Research*" represent some of that research that is starting to take bloom. The conference forum united the ideas of more than 40 scholars from many countries of the world who participated with their comments delivering more value to the research presented at the conferences. This conference continued the practices of the international online discussion forums introduced at the previous online conferences in 2020 and 2021 (Hundal, Kostyuk, & Govorun, 2021; Sylos Labini, Kostyuk, & Govorun, 2020; Kostyuk, Guedes, & Govorun, 2020). We hope that all these efforts will be able to discover new pathways for corporate governance research.

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