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Actor-networking stakeholder theory for today's corporate communications

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to suggest a need to widen stakeholder theory to include non-human influences to better describe the complex corporate environment. Drawing from actor-network theory, non-human entities may "translate" new, unexpected stakeholders to support their aims.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper employs a theoretical conceptual approach with three illustrative examples.

Findings – The examples provided show that corporate crises result partly from previously unacknowledged non-human spheres of influence and cause corporations serious losses. Corporations that take a proactive stance and monitor the weak signals of change are able to improve their standing and maintain legitimacy.

Research limitations/implications – The framework created requires more testing with different examples across contexts and cultures. Future studies should examine the process of translation more deeply and examine who can potentially be translated into a stakeholder.

Practical implications – Corporate communication should play "the devil's advocate" on issues and analyze not only stakeholders, but also non-human entities that may be able to translate others into joining their cause.

Originality/value – This paper broadens stakeholder theory to better describe the current corporate environment by highlighting the process of translation among stakeholders and non-human entities.

Keywords Stakeholder analysis, Corporate communications, Strategic planning, Networking

Paper type Conceptual paper

1. Introduction

"You don't know what you got till it's gone" has become a timely wisdom for corporations today. With an unstable economy and insecure future, corporations are finding it hard to predict how changes ahead will affect their stakeholders. Stakeholder relations are at the heart of corporate communications (Coombs and Holladay, 2007; Grunig and Huang, 2000; Ledingham and Bruning, 2000; Plowman, 2007; Wu, 2007), and it has recently been suggested that public relations are equivalent to "stakeholder relations" (Wu, 2007). Analyzing and monitoring the corporate environment should consist of locating the interrelations of different stakes as well as their holders. Previous literature on stakeholders has mostly concentrated on social networks between corporations and their stakeholders (Bornsen *et al.*, 2008; Bruning *et al.*, 2008;

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Coombs and Holladay, 2008; Foley and Kendrick, 2006; Jahansoozi, 2007; Steurer, 2006; Rawlins, 2006; Mitchell *et al.*, 1997; Näsi, 1995). Social networks between people, however, constitute only one part of the larger networks that sustain society and corporations. Strategic communication for corporations means looking beyond obvious stakeholders into potential uncharted territory (Fox, 2008). A broader understanding of the stakeholder "field of forces" within which corporations function is needed. Without this understanding, many important stakes as well as stakeholders may remain hidden, exposing the corporation to potential harm.

Actor-network theory (ANT) (Latour, 2005, 1994) is intended to explain complex networks in challenging settings and offers a fresh approach to studying corporate environments. ANT helps map both the stakeholders as well as the non-human entities that affect the success of corporations. ANT argues that what matters are not actors' identities or the categories they fit, but rather their interrelations and the stakes they hold, whether the influences are human or non-human. The main contributions of ANT can be seen in the wider understanding it offers of networks and their formation, as it emphasizes the importance of constant negotiation and inscription (through a process of translation) and acknowledges non-human entities as important parts of the corporate environment (Cooren and Fairhurst, 2008; Somerville, 1999). This is a step toward identifying issues and stakes rather than individual stakeholders or stakeholder groups (Luoma-aho and Vos, 2009; Wu, 2007). ANT is especially useful for further development of stakeholder theory as it does not aim to predict outcomes, but allows for variations by merely mapping the whole network and highlighting the process of translation, where actors convince others to join their cause.

This paper addresses, the timely topic of different stakes in the corporate environment. It starts with what is known and the limitations of previous stakeholder theory: not fully understanding the non-human entities (concept derived from ANT) that can lead to new stakeholders. To illustrate, three recent examples from the corporate world show how non-human entities such as infrastructure, technology, and market trends contributed to translating masses into opposing the corporation or leveraging wide support for it. The first example deals with an IT-system merger of the Danish Danske Bank and the Finnish Sampo Bank in early Spring 2008. The second example is the prolonged building process of a paper-mill in Uruguay in 2006 by the Finnish Corporation Botnia. The third example is the greening of the mobile phone market and the proactive role taken by the global mobile producer Nokia. These examples illustrate the need to better understand the different stakes and highlight the need to plan for "potential 'disbenefits'" (Fox, 2008, p. 1197). In practice, planning for potential disbenefits is could include playing the devil's advocate to understand what all could go wrong and what the non-obvious implications of choices and decision made are.

The paper first examines, the definitions of a stakeholder and explains the need for a broader understanding of stakes. Second, borrowing from ANT, the paper introduces the process of "translation," where actors mobilize others into joining their network. The question is: who can existing stakeholders and non-human entities potentially translate into joining their cause? Three examples are followed by conclusions and discussion on practical implications for corporate communication and suggestions for future study.

2. What is missing from stakeholder theory?

The premises of stakeholder theory are clear: corporate networks both restrict and facilitate its functioning, assuming that a favorable operating environment is beneficial and an unfavorable one harmful (Carroll, 1993; Grunig and Repper, 1992; Freeman, 1984; Wood and Jones, 1995). Stakeholder theory acknowledges that a corporation creates or activates some publics by its mere existence (Grunig *et al.*, 1992). On the other hand, stakeholders are entities and individuals who also exist in the absence of the corporation (Rowley, 1997). Corporations merely provoke some aspects of pre-existing entities and spheres of influence and a social relation is formed (Hallahan, 2000). Hence, corporate success can be measured through the stakeholders' and publics' opinions, and how well the corporation responds to them (Grunig *et al.*, 1992; Waddock and Graves, 1997).

Previously, the focus has been on financial benefits (Neville *et al.*, 2005) and different ways of categorizing stakeholders (Mitchell *et al.*, 1997; Rawlins, 2006), as the theory has been applied to different contexts across disciplines, from information systems (Pouloudi, 1999) to environmental reporting (Steurer, 2006) and accounting (Moneva *et al.*, 2007). Despite the different frames of reference, most scholars agree that the term "stakeholders" refers to "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives" (Freeman, 1984, p. 46). This definition represents the broad approach to stakeholder theory where almost anyone can be a stakeholder (Illia and Lurati, 2006, p. 293). Others prefer to take what Illia and Lurati (2006) call "the narrow a priori" approach (Mitchell *et al.*, 1997; Clarkson, 1995) where the focus is on mapping stakeholder impact. In "the narrow situational" approach focus is on contextual consequences (Winn, 2001; Savage *et al.*, 1991).

Some scholars prefer to talk of "publics" (Grunig and Repper, 1992) instead of "stakeholders," but here the focus is on the underlying idea of corporate relationships, which they both represent. The central idea is mutual dependence: individuals or groups depend on the corporation to fulfill their aims, and the corporation depends on them for its existence (Rhenman, 1964). A corporation is hence a socio-technical system that enables the fulfillment of different needs as "stakeholders make up the fragile ecosystem of any business" (Foley and Kendrick, 2006, p. 62). Dealing with stakeholders, therefore, consists of continuously "balancing and integrating multiple relationships and multiple objectives" (Freeman and McVea, 2001). There is a need to segment and prioritize stakeholders. Among the most fruitful of such efforts have been the nested model of stakeholder segmentation by Grunig and Repper (1992) as well as stakeholder salience model of Mitchell *et al.* (1997). To solve the multi-objective dilemma of different stakeholder needs, Winn (2001) models a stakeholder decision-making process that differentiates between stakeholders, objectives and issues. The many ways in which stakeholders have been categorized and prioritized show a need for better understanding the process of becoming a stakeholder.

Some have criticized the stakeholder concept for having, thus far at least, failed to match the dynamism of public relations (Wu, 2007). Critics note that stakeholder theory lacks important features of theory building, such as context and causal laws that explain the processes of interest, as well as specific theory logic of how publics are formed (Key, 1999). In addition, it has been argued that stakeholder theory overemphasizes the role of the organization and oversimplifies the chaotic and complex

nature of the corporate environment (Steurer, 2006). Different actors affecting organizational operations have not been emphasized enough and many important "stakes" remain unacknowledged by previous studies. Studies have focused on social connections and organizations at the macro-level, yet even those have seldom concentrated on the whole stakeholder field of forces, as handbooks end where the analysis of the macro-field would begin. Some attempts have been made such as Waddock and Graves' (1997) explanation of ecological environmental stakeholders during a period when their importance was not fully understood. Rowley (1997) was one of the first to map multiple stakeholder networks beyond dyadic ties, but focused on the network qualities of groups rather than their formation. In most studies, the focus has most often been on the importance of networks (Castells, 1996; Contractor *et al.*, 2006) or their by-products, such as social capital (Putnam, 1993, 2000; Hazleton and Kennan, 2000; Ihlen, 2005; Luoma-aho, 2005).

Freeman's (1984) broad definition of stakeholders has served as the springboard for new definitions. Scholars are still debating whether non-human stakeholders can be equally as important as human stakeholders (Starik, 1995; Vidgen and McMaster, 1996), but Vidgen and McMaster (1996, p. 255) boldly define stakeholders as any "human or nonhuman organization unit that can affect as well as be affected by a human or nonhuman organization unit's policy or policies." They note, however, that it is not always possible to treat non-human influences as if they were equal to human stakeholders. Instead of projecting human qualities, the focus of interest should be on the potential representatives of the non-human influences, or the human actors representing them. This representation has been missing from stakeholder literature. What is needed is broader understanding of the stakeholder field of forces in which today's organizations function. To bridge this gap, ANT and the process of translation are next introduced.

3. ANT and the process of translation

The ANT (Callon, 1986; Latour, 2005) offers "a theoretical shift in emphasis away from the centrality and primacy of human subject" (Somerville, 1999, p. 8). It argues that every act of establishing something is linked with the different factors influencing it, such as its surroundings, regulations, other people, technology, etc. For ANT, humans are not the only beings with agency nor the only entities to "act"; all are actants and they play a role. Actants can be anything from machines to landscaping, anyone or anything with a "capability" to make a difference (Giddens, 1984).

Only a few studies thus far have combined stakeholder theory and ANT. The process of translation has been studied in the consultancy context (Clark and Salaman, 1996). From the organizational point of view, Cooper (1992) studied modes of organizing that are related to ANT, whereas Cooper and Law (1995) studied organizations as entities and processes. Somerville (1999) presents ANT as having something to offer for the theory and practice of public relations, through description of the struggle between not only social, but also other actors. Along these lines, Cooren and Fairhurst (2008) aim to bridge the micro-macro gap in organizing by suggesting that things, machines and text also communicate. Previous studies on ANT have concentrated on artifacts, such as the actor-networks of an automatic door opener (Latour, 1988), the engineering and building of a bridge (Suchman, 2000) or the role of the telecommunications market in strategy formulation (Gao, 2005).

The point is not to make these non-human entities stakeholders or retrieve any agency from humans, but rather to note that their "lack of will or intention does not disqualify them from making a difference" (Cooren and Fairhurst, 2008, p. 131). Moreover, the non-human entities might "translate" new, unexpected humans to join their network and hence become stakeholders. The process of translation has much in common with the idea of issues management, and the process of translation is in fact similar to an "issue life cycle" analysis (Ackerman, 1975; Hainsworth and Meng, 1988; Heath, 1997; Mahon and Waddock, 1992).

The process of translation (Callon, 1980, 1986; Singleton and Michael, 1993) can be understood as a kind of consensus-seeking process, a multifaceted interaction where one entity gives a role to others. In the process, "heterogeneous engineers" (Law, 1987, p. 366) seek, mold and enroll allies for an argument or position. Translation is a process of re-interpretation and re-presentation as it "generates ordering effects such as devices, agents, institutions, or organizations." If the process of translation is successful, a network of aligned interests is formed. The players are not separate, but intertwined: "An actor network is simultaneously an actor whose activity is networking heterogeneous elements and a network that is able to redefine and transform what it is made of" (Callon, 1987, p. 93).

A translation may or may not be successful, and networks are contingent. There is no fixed final network, but rather all networks are molded by the inclusion of new elements and changes in the relationship between actors over time. As actors may have different interests and anticipations, translations take different forms to mobilize maximum support: re-interpretation, re-presentation or appropriation of others' interests to one's own. In other words, by translation one and the same interest or anticipation may be presented in different ways, thereby mobilizing broader support. The processes of translation are ongoing and several related or unrelated processes of translation can take place at the same time, as translations take place in the different corporate settings and areas of responsibility. For example, a corporation can simultaneously be involved in industry lobbing, be covered in the news for its new products, conduct negotiations with partners, be the target of online activism and take part in academic discussion. In some of these translation processes, the corporation may have a better chance at becoming central in the network (obligatory passage points (OPP), see next paragraph), while in others it can merely be translated into an existing network. The amount and flux of existing networks is visible for example in the blogosphere, where issues and expertise are constantly debated and renegotiated (Illia, 2003), and corporations are seldom the only ones at the center of those issues.

Translation starts with "problematization," where the issue or problem to be solved is addressed and relevant actors are decided upon. This leads to the process of finding delegates to represent groups of actors. Strong actors (focal or primary actors) aim at becoming OPPs for the network. The second phase is "intressement," where persuasion takes place: the focal actor motivates and negotiates with the others to get them interested and involved in the network. After that comes the third phase, "enrolment," which includes consent of the actors to the roles defined for them and explained during the previous phases. Communication is key for enrolment as it shapes expectations and actions. For example, those well informed and aware of coming changes are less likely to be negotiated into a network of opposition. On the other hand, those aware of arising issues

have the chance to take a proactive stance and aim to become OPPs in the early stages of the forming network.

Although here these stages are separated, they are not always separable and different translations may overlap. It is also important to remember that the process of translation does not always take place in the way intended and that something may happen to rupture the network after a successful translation. Moreover, the network structure changes every time new translations take place and more interests have to be negotiated. To conclude, translation is the path through which one entity, for example the organization, guides other entities toward its desired understanding. The goal is eventually to be able to speak on behalf of other actors enrolled in the network.

As translation is a way to present one specific interest in different ways to mobilize broader support, it offers a comprehensive way of approaching the various ongoing stakeholder negotiations of corporations. Although the emphasis in stakeholder theory has thus far been on the persuasive process of intressement, corporations and their different stakeholders also undergo the phases of problematization and enrolment. In the problematization phase, corporations mark their terrain by mapping the issue of interest and the relevant actors, processes known in the traditional stakeholder literature as "monitoring" or "environmental scanning" (Vos and Schoemaker, 2006) or "issues identification" (Ackerman, 1975; Heath, 1997; Grunig and Repper, 1992; Regester and Larkin, 2005). The second phase of intressement focuses on the persuasive processes, addressed in stakeholder terms as stakeholder management or stakeholder alignment. The third stage of receiving consent and maintaining it is comparable to what the literature sees as achieving legitimacy (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; Deephouse and Carter, 2005) or reaching a level of consensus. Early identification is vital, as often with time the available choices to react diminish and costs rise (Regester and Larkin, 2005).

4. Translation in practice

What would translating stakeholders be like in practice? The corporation is not the only one aiming to translate stakeholders. Other entities (human as well as non-human) translate stakeholders into their network as well. Building on ANT and previous theorizing (Schaltegger *et al.*, 2003), Figure 1 shows the potential spheres from which new stakeholders can be translated: sociocultural, political, legal, technological, spatiotemporal, and ecological. The sociocultural refers to social and cultural connections between individuals and groups (such as cultural norms, and family relations), whereas the political sphere refers to the power relations and policies that are currently enforced (political systems, decision-making processes). The legal refers to the world of legislation and rules (industry regulations, reporting practices), whereas the technological refers to the mostly non-human world consisting of electronics, devices and software (computers, cell-phones, and security systems). Spatiotemporal refers to the climate, space and contemporary trends (infrastructure, transportation, and green-thinking), whereas the ecological refers to the natural environment of plants, resources and ecosystems (oceans, forests, and air). The spheres overlap and change, without clear boundaries between them. Some human dominant spheres have thus far been well-acknowledged in stakeholder literature (sociocultural, political, and legal). At the same time, others (technological, spatiotemporal, and ecological) have received less attention, almost no theorizing and few empirical studies, despite their critical role

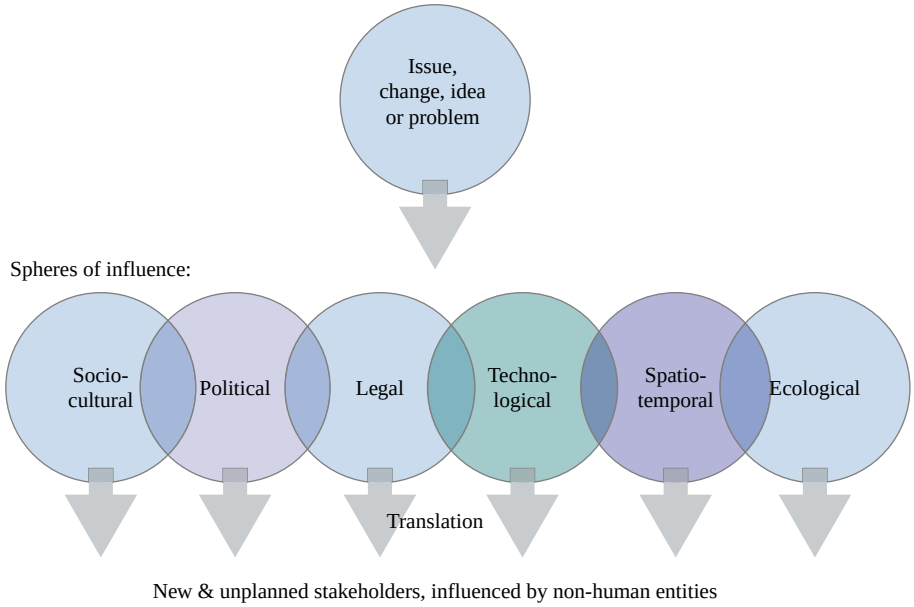

Figure 1. The potential spheres of influence that new/unplanned stakeholders can be translated from by a stimulus such as an issue, change, idea or a problem

for organizational survival and success today. Figure 1 shows that it is often an issue, not a corporation that starts the process of translation. Hence, the process may be difficult for corporations to conceive.

The process of identifying issues has been previously addressed (Regester and Larkin, 2005), yet the ongoing nature of this process as suggested by ANT is new. To illustrate the importance of the often-overlooked non-human entities, three examples are presented. In two examples, the corporations planned their operations with care, did everything correctly in light of the traditional stakeholder theory, included the obvious human stakeholders, broke no laws and tried their best, yet ran into severe problems by ignoring the non-human entities and their ability to translate powerful new stakeholders into the picture. These problems were a surprise as they originated in spheres not commonly addressed in stakeholder mappings: the technological, spatiotemporal, and ecosphere (Schaltegger *et al.*, 2003). In the third example, the corporation managed to predict the coming translations and managed to became an OPP for that network, hence gaining competitive advantage and also becoming an industry trend setter. Building on the idea of translation from ANT, the three examples are next described.

4.1 Bank merger and technological entities

Background. The Nordic countries witnessed an interesting merger in the banking sector in the year 2008. The Danish Danske Bank bought the Finnish Sampo Bank, and Sampo spent the spring merging their functions and services, and modifying their IT systems to match Danske. Sampo is one of the largest consumer banks in Finland (total population of about 5.2 million), with about one million e-banking customers. According to the traditional stakeholder networks, the merger seemed possible.

Negotiations were started well in time, and many possible stakeholders were taken into consideration. The non-human entities and the potential stakeholders these entities could translate, however, remained hidden until the IT merger began in practice at the end of March 2008.

Problematization. The network in this example could be called the network of the "unsatisfied," where the IT-problem took the central role of negotiating others into joining it. The problems the bank faced were of nightmare proportions in the banking business, where time is money: cards were not functioning, payments and salaries went missing, accounts showed a zero balance, online-banking services were out of order, payments were not made nor received and very little information was available to customers. About 30,000 customers were estimated to have left the bank in a period of few months by fall 2008, including some big clients after their salary-systems went down (Yle, 2008; Uusi Suomi, 2008). The experiences received a huge amount of attention in different news forums and blogs (Saarikko, 2008). Although the technological sphere is non-human, it had translated some powerful human stakeholders to join its cause: the bank's existing customers. For example, Amnesty International, the bank's large client in Finland, was left without its €90,000 donations in April due to the bank's "technological difficulties" (Helsingin Sanomat, 2008a). The bank's problems took place in the somewhat unpredictable technological sphere, and IT-trade publications within that sphere also reported on it and even found holes in the bank's security systems (Tietokone, 2008), increasing the seriousness of the crises.

Intressement. Employees of Sampo Bank participated in a training project concerning the migration to the Group shared IT platform and the migration of data itself went well (Danske Bank, 2009). Training included onsite and e-Learning sessions both before and after the migration day. The Finnish employees of the bank were informed of the changes in systems and procedures mainly through the intranet portal, which carried webcasts and news articles (Danske Bank, 2009). The customers, however, were not trained for a number of unexpected system problems and were not informed sufficiently. Clients reported their personal data showing up on the ATM screens unexpectedly and non-existent communications from the bank. In addition, the first official comments from Sampo Bank, made by the head of communications, offered no apologies. Sampo Bank soon realized that they needed a new approach for persuading their customers. Hence, the CEO of the bank issued an apology to customers later on. Still, the CEO did not say if the bank would offer any monetary compensation beyond the actual monetary losses for the aggravation that may have been caused (Helsingin Sanomat, 2008b).

Enrolment. The Danske Bank group carries out surveys annually to monitor the satisfaction of their employees and customers. The results of the customer survey in 2008 showed that Sampo Bank was at the bottom of the Finnish banking sector range (Danske Bank, 2009):

> Customer satisfaction data from Sampo Bank for January to June 2008 show a large drop in the level of satisfaction immediately after the migration, mainly because of technical problems which involved online banking and card transactions.

According to Danske Bank (2009) *Corporate Responsibility* report, Sampo Bank employees consented to their roles in the new system more willingly than the customers:

> [. . .] Sampo Bank's image took a beating that also affected employees, who nevertheless kept up a positive spirit. Even though the employees worked under extremely challenging conditions while serving customers with the new systems, the integration process did not affect the total number of sick leaves or the bank's ability to retain and attract employees.

Corporate communications had succeeded in one area, yet failed in another. The technical problems did not manage to enroll the employees to the network of the unsatisfied, as they were "protected by corporate communication." They received continuous information about what to expect. Customers did not receive enough communication about the issue and the problems in the merger managed to enroll customers into the destructive network of the unsatisfied. Figure 2 sums this up.

4.2 Spatial/temporal sphere and building a factory

Background. The Finnish Botnia corporation started building a paper-mill in Fray Bentos, Uruguay in 2006. Fray Bentos is located on the border of Uruguay and Argentina close to the River Uruguay and the pulp mill itself represents the biggest industrial investment in the history of Uruguay. The general atmosphere globally is not supportive of heavy industry, forcing corporations in that sector to be especially transparent. On the other hand, during economic downtimes, news of industries that are able to provide work and rise competitiveness are positive.

Problematization. The problems started when the local people on the other side of the river (Argentinians) expressed their concerns about the environmental impacts of the pulp mill. Many of them reported that their livelihoods (tourism, agriculture, and fishing) would be threatened by the mill (Helsingin Sanomat, 2006). The network forming here could be described as the network of the "opposing." The geological border river translated people, who formed a civic movement that further tempted many of the locals and international environmental activist groups into joining and began to resist the Botnia project first with petitions, later with road-blocks and protests (Helsingin Sanomat, 2006). The construction process was slowed down because of breakdowns in the infra-structure and a hostile political climate: with no access to the site, the materials could not get to the area. With people unwilling to co-operate, the process became even more difficult. The spatial stakeholders included both the Uruguayan and the Argentinian natural environment (forest, river, and fauna), infrastructure in the area, (roads to the site) and weather conditions.

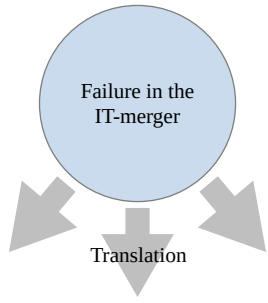

Figure 2. New stakeholders translated into the network of the "unsatisfied" from technological sphere in a bank merger

Some of these were taken up by locals and environmental groups, who then in practice affected the spatial sphere by blocking the roads to the site and halting construction. The temporal sphere also included the general green-thinking and corporate social responsibility (CSR) trends much vaunted in business today, and a general atmosphere antagonistic to heavy industry especially in the poorer countries. Latin American countries are only lately beginning to approach the International Court of Justice with environmental matters instead of conventional territorial disputes (Dodds, 2008).

Intressement. Botnia seemed to be doing everything legally right: in 2003 Botnia began an obligatory environmental impact assessment and has since conducted a socio-economic study and five public forums (Botnia, 2007). The resistance and infrastructural blocks came as a surprise to Botnia, as they appeared on the Argentinian side of the river and the non-human entities such as the river and the national border seemed to play a major role. Botnia is lately aiming to become a part of the network by providing monitoring data from the Fray Bentos mill on their web site. There is also data on the results from both the mill's effluent and air emissions, as well as data from the measurement points in the river and air (Botnia, 2008f). Moreover, Botnia has opened a call centre to give information and answers regarding mill operations to the local people (Botnia, 2008a). In addition, Botnia launched educational traveling exhibition which provides and shares information on the whole pulp production process (Botnia, 2008b) and organized a city festival in Fray Bentos (Botnia, 2008c). The CEO of Botnia also expressed Botnia's willingness to assist the Uruguayan Government in solving the conflict with Argentina (Botnia, 2008e).

Enrolment. In spite of local and global opposition, the mill received the authorization to start operations from the Uruguayan Government on November 2007. The first year of operation (2008) of the pulp mill was a success for Botnia. According to Botnia's (2009) press release, "the mill achieved an annual production of 935,000 metric tons and met the tight quality and environmental objectives". In addition, Botnia received approval from the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change for Fray Bentos pulp mill bio-energy production as a Clean Development Mechanism project (Botnia, 2008d). Local people on the Argentinean side of the river, however, have not fully accepted their roles as contended neighbors of a pulp mill, which can be seen from the current touristic information webpage of Argentina (Welcome Argentina, 2009):

> Gualeguaychú features an attractive coastline and its relief presents typical green hills ending at the Gualeguaychú River, where a wonderful bathing resort called Ñandubaysal still preserves its beauty despite the presence of the controversial Botnia pulp mill on the opposite bank.

In the case of Botnia, those with enough information and hence not negotiated into the network of the "opposing" were the international licensers and legislators, as well as the people on the Uruguayan side of the river, where the factory was built. The people living on the other side of the river were left outside the communication loop, and many were translated into the network of "opposing" Botnia. Figure 3 shows the translation process in the Botnia example in simplified form.

4.3 Temporal/political sphere and the greening mobile phone markets

Background. Nokia is a world leader in the mobile phone market, especially well-known for its good work in CSR. Its products, mobile phones have a complicated structure and material composition, consisting of 500-1,000 components, and the consumption

of mobile phones is growing globally. From the product life cycle perspective, there are many issues associated with the environmental performance of the mobile phones. Greenpeace releases regularly a guide to greener electronics, which ranks the manufacturers according to their policies on toxic chemicals, recycling and climate change. Many companies are reluctant to aid regulation, and instead are only reactive to proposals.

Problematization. Nokia, through its networks, was able to pick up on the weak signals of change that there was an increased interest in "greening markets," (making electronics more environmentally friendly), and the coming industry regulations related to this. Instead of waiting and reacting, it saw an opportunity in being involved in the planning for the new regulations and gain not only a better reputation but more power in the political sphere. Nokia aimed at becoming an OPP for the "greening mobile market" network, and it was the first to proactively address the environmental problems of mobile phones throughout the product life cycle. (The main environmental issues included material and energy consumption in components manufacturing, transportation, standby power consumption of the charger in the use phase and end-of-life management of mobile phones.) By addressing these issues, Nokia was not victimized by the new issue. Moreover, within the network, it could help select who would be relevant for this issue. The network collected together competing mobile phone producers (Motorola and Panasonic), component manufacturers, governmental organizations European Commission (EC) (EC and UK Defra), research institutes, telecom operators/retailers, recyclers, NGOs, and consumers. These groups of actors were represented by specific actors such as WWF (NGOs) and European Consumer Organization. As an authority to the network, the EC selected Nokia to run a pilot project for the product group of mobile phones to demonstrate the applicability of integrated product policy (IPP) hence making Nokia the industry leader in several aspects.

Intressement. In the "greening mobile market" network, stakeholders negotiated on options to improve the environmental impact of mobile phones. Nokia, a leader in this network, prepared a draft report on identifying these options throughout the life cycle of mobile phones. Being involved early on gave Nokia a competitive advantage in respect to its competitors. Contributions from the selected stakeholders were included and the EC, for example, described the policy tools possible to use for the greening

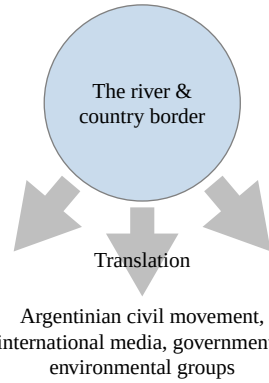

Figure 3.
New stakeholders translated into the network of "opposition" from spatio-temporal sphere in a factory building project

supply chains of mobile phones. The EC invited stakeholders to comment on the report (June 2005, December 2005), and the social and economic effects of options improving the environmental impact of the mobile phones were evaluated.

Enrolment. Stakeholders made commitments to improve the environmental impact of mobile phones and to take actions in the key environmental areas. Stakeholders committed to carry out different initiatives to green the mobile phone market. New environmental initiatives were related to information and communications (product environmental facts and usage and disposal information), such as reduction of energy consumption, reduction/elimination of agreed materials of concern, take-back of phones as well as environmental assessment methods/tools. Specific task forces were formed among the stakeholders and other interested volunteers were welcomed to join the task forces. Another stakeholder meeting was arranged in May 2006 and a final pilot project report describing the actions to be carried out by the stakeholders was prepared. In the implementation phase, all the initiatives were monitored by the EC (EC, 2008; Nokia, 2005; 2009; IPP Pilot Task Forces, 2008).

From within the network, Nokia was able to gather all the important information it needed and better plan its future strategy. Had Nokia not seen the issue of greening technology raising, it would probably have been surprised by the new industry regulations as well as the changing customer expectations. The process of translation is shown in Figure 4.

5. Discussion and critique

Scholars have called for a broader understanding of the corporate environment (Zerfass *et al.*, 2008), yet few studies have addressed this need. Originally stakeholder theories have been developed to map the terrain and help corporations balance different needs. So far, stakeholder theory has focused mostly on the sociocultural sphere and marginalized some important non-human entities. The environment in which corporations operate today, however, is no longer dominated by human interaction alone. Instead, different technologies, infrastructures and political agendas are playing increasingly important roles as they "translate" sometimes unexpected individuals and groups into important stakeholders on issues. Monitoring the corporate environment is

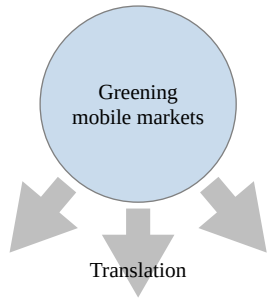

Figure 4.
New stakeholders translated from temporal/political sphere in the greening mobile phone market

especially important as the various stakeholders have better access to information today and can act through various real time media. Search-engines and other automated robots pick up weak signals and cues for change and process them in real time.

While ANT itself is somewhat new for corporate communications, it is of value as it challenges stakeholder theory to include all the different elements of society that are linked. It notes the importance of impartiality and the danger of assumptions: categorizations (stakeholder and non-stakeholder) risk having excessively strict boundaries between subject and object, and do not adequately describe the various networks in operation in society. This paper calls for a more strategic approach to the planning and analysis of the impact and existence of different networks and it moves stakeholder theory away from the dangers of a corporation-centered approach.

The rise of the non-human entities (Cooren and Fairhurst, 2008) brings new challenges to corporate communications. Corporate legitimacy depends less and less on the corporation, and maintaining it requires a change to a more scrutinous analysis of the operating environment than before. On some levels, there is an increased need for issues management, as many of the networks are formed around issues, not the corporation or stakeholders. Though it may be a difficult task in the beginning, mapping the potential stakeholders in the different spheres will prove to be worth it in time. Mapping, however, should not be a job left to the communicators alone because inputs are required from everyone inside the organization from CEO to call center workers. This mapping and monitoring may lead to a strategy of proactive translation, or it may lead to adaptation to the corporate environment. Whatever the strategy chosen, corporations need to more actively monitor their environments to avoid surprises.

The three examples illustrate, the value of strategic planning in several ways. First, they demonstrate how good communications can directly affect profitability and performance through avoiding corporate crises. The examples highlight the importance of monitoring the corporate environment for weak signals of change and mapping the potentially translatable stakeholders. Both Botnia and Sampo Bank did not understand the potential stakeholders that could arise from the non-human spheres, causing them both severe financial and reputational losses. Nokia on the other hand, was able to become a central player in the forming network early on and gained competitive leverage while becoming an industry leader in product life cycle. Second, as illustrated in the examples, corporate communications had the central role of maintaining a sense of community and keeping people involved. The analysis revealed that those stakeholders who were included in the dialogue with the corporation and who had enough information available to them on the changes ahead (Sampo's employees, the Argentinians and legislators in Botnia's case), were not translated into the opposing networks.

In sum, understanding the ongoing nature of translation and the importance of being ready to involve the different, translated stakeholders with their issues could have saved these organizations from serious losses. Corporate communication is needed more than ever as communication practitioners are best equipped to predict the formation of new networks and their outcomes. In fact, corporate communications should increasingly play the devil's advocate at the strategy table and map all possible scenarios of who could be translated into the network and what could go wrong (Fox, 2008).

Despite its advantages, several criticisms concerning the application of ANT to stakeholder theory should be acknowledged. First, combining a practical tool with

a complex theory always results in compromise, with some ideas receiving greater emphasis than others. ANT, however, provides a unique approach to accessing and defining the previously ignored non-human entities and their influence. Second, as Pouloudi (1999) notes, there are problems in the processes of identification and description. With the inclusion of non-human influences, the complexity of the surroundings multiplies as non-human stakeholders often comprise several previously combined elements. Also, the notions of stakeholders' "stakes," such as voice or interest, remains unresolved. Despite these continuing problems, this paper argues that the non-human entities should be better acknowledged in stakeholder literature, to better describe the complex world constructed from human and non-human entities (Somerville, 1999, p. 11).

This shift in attention has already begun taking place in the literature on CSR and environmental reporting (Clarkson, 1995; Cooper and Owen, 2007; Steurer, 2006) as norms are drawn up on how to report on corporate affects on the non-human spheres such as the natural environment. Future studies should focus on empirical testing of the translation process or the network-forming negotiation phases of problematization, intressement, and enrolment. Futures studies should also examine whether corporations are aware of the changes in their environment and whether they are equipped to monitor the non-human spheres. The line between human stakeholders and non-human entities also requires deeper study, to identify the different types of impact and effects they might have on corporations. New, bold questions need to be asked: how are stakeholders in different spheres related? Whom can they translate into allies for their causes? Who can hamper the technology used? What are the newest trends in policy and what direction will future development take?

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