

## Cross-Sector Partnerships to Address Societal Grand Challenges: Systematizing Differences in Scholarly Analysis

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**ABSTRACT** Research on how cross-sector partnerships (CSPs) contribute toward addressing societal grand challenges (SGCs) has burgeoned, yet studies differ significantly in what scholars analyze and how. These differences matter as they influence the reported results. In the absence of a comprehensive framework to expose the analytical choices behind each study and their implications, this diversity challenges interpretation and consolidation of evidence upon which novel theory and practical interventions can be developed. In this study, we conduct a systematic review of scholarly analysis in CSP management studies to develop a framework that contextualizes the SGC-related evidence and reveals scholars' analytical choices and their implications. Conceptually, we advance the term 'SGC interventions' to illuminate the black box leading to SGC-related effects, thus helping to differentiate between transformative versus mitigative interventions in scholars' analytical focus. Moreover, the framework stresses the logical interplay between the framing of the SGC-related problem and the reporting of the intervention's effects. Through this, we juxtapose what we call problem-centric versus solution-centric SGC analysis and so differentiate between their analytical purpose. We discuss the framework's implications for advancing an SGC perspective in scholarly analysis of CSPs and outline avenues for future research.

**Keywords:** cross-sector partnerships, impact, literature review, scholarly analysis, social issues, societal grand challenges

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## INTRODUCTION

Scholarly insights into how organizations contribute toward addressing societal grand challenges (SGCs) have become increasingly important in an era of climate change, widening social inequalities, and global pandemics (George et al., 2016; Howard-Grenville and Spengler, 2022). These challenges are ‘societal’ as they affect multiple members of society and their environment, and they are ‘grand’ because they are highly complex (Brammer et al., 2019; Gümüşay et al., 2022). Tackling SGCs requires substantial resources, innovative approaches, and collaboration between diverse stakeholders (George et al., 2016) – requirements that cross-sector partnerships (CSPs) between public, business, and/or civil-society actors may fulfil (Austin and Seitanidi, 2012a, 2012b; Clarke and Crane, 2018). This promise has given rise to a growing body of CSP studies that also caution about the challenges (e.g., Gray et al., 2022; Huxham and Vangen, 2000) and negative effects that these partnerships may engender (e.g., Olwig, 2021; Vestergaard et al., 2020). Therefore, consolidating the empirical evidence and drawing conclusions about CSPs’ contributions toward addressing SGCs is now a high priority (Clarke and Crane, 2018; George et al., 2016; Van Tulder et al., 2016).

However, our initial screening of the literature showed that making sense of respective studies and consolidating the SGC-related evidence is more complex than considering the reported social and environmental effects.<sup>[1]</sup> For example, CSPs tend to be described with different SGC-related aims against which the reported results should be assessed. Moreover, some studies investigate whether CSPs achieved their aims whereas others investigate CSPs’ societal effects more broadly. These analytical differences matter as they influence what effects are reported. If ignored, they limit the comparability of findings and challenge the consolidation of evidence, positive or negative, about CSPs’ contributions toward addressing SGCs. Specifically, we lack a comprehensive framework for SGC-centric analysis in management studies that helps expose scholars’ analytical choices, outlines the implications of the specific choices made, and thus helps readers, reviewers, and editors contextualize and make sense of the reported effects. Such a framework would further provide guidance for management scholars to make more informed analytical choices and, ultimately, help structure the literature for future integrative studies.

We seek to address this gap and focus on the CSP literature, given the prominence CSPs have gained in addressing SGCs, such as through the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) #17 ‘Partnerships for the Goals’ (George et al., 2023). However, understanding the implications of scholars’ analytical choices contributes to advancing an SGC-centric perspective in organizational research more broadly (Pop et al., 2023; Wickert, 2021). This includes the study of social enterprises and hybrid organizations (Akemu et al., 2016), non-profit organizations (NPOs) and international organizations (Ambos and Tatarinov, 2022), public projects (Bryson et al., 2014), companies’ unilateral corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives (Aguinis and Glavas, 2012), and SGC-related inter-firm collaboration (Marques, 2017). The analytical toolkit we propose helps consolidate SGC-related evidence across different organizational forms

while acknowledging the boundaries that scholars' analytical choices imply for interpreting, comparing, and integrating respective results.

In this study, we aim to advance the field by conducting a systematic review of empirical studies on CSPs to answer the question: *How do scholarly analyzes of CSPs and their SGC-related effects differ and what conclusions can be drawn to guide and integrate empirical research?* Based on a set of 73 empirical CSP studies, we develop an analytical framework composed of three interrelated building blocks – the SGC-related problem, intervention, and reporting of effects – that contextualize the empirical evidence and help systematize differences in scholarly analyzes. Specifically, in order to make sense of the reported effects, we need to understand the SGC-related problem that a CSP aims to address. Additionally, to establish the link between the SGC and the reported effects, information is needed about the CSP as well as about what the partners did to address the SGC and generate these effects.

By positioning CSPs between the SGC and the reported social and environmental effects, this framework underscores that 'the overall value of CSPs is not merely in connecting interested parties but, rather, in their ability to act – to substantially influence the people and issues in their problem domain' (Koschmann et al., 2012, p. 333). In this regard, CSPs become 'SGC interventions' in the spirit of 'purposely implemented change strategies' (Fraser et al., 2009, p. 6). In health, social work, urban planning, and environmental research, interventions to alter a human or environmental situation in some desired direction (Sieber, 2013) are commonly used as the unit of analysis to unpack the processes leading to effects (Fraser and Galinsky, 2010). Considering CSPs as SGC interventions directs attention to what CSP partners do and aim for regarding the targeted SGC. Such framing provides a foundation to compare scholars' analytical focus by directing the attention to the type of SGC intervention they analyze.

The interventions scholars described in our sample of CSP studies differed in the SGC-related aim, activities, and involvement of stakeholders. These differences reveal two ways of thinking about and conceptualizing CSPs. One set of studies describe CSPs as transformative interventions aimed at addressing multiple, often interconnected factors contributing to an SGC and triggering transformative change (see also Dentoni et al., 2018; Gray et al., 2022; Van Tulder and Keen, 2018). Another set describe them as mitigative interventions aimed at helping governments, businesses, and/or civil-society organizations to alleviate the implications of SGCs (see also Bryson et al., 2015; Huxham and Vangen, 2000; Quélin et al., 2017). With the aim of systematizing these differences, we suggest that choosing one or the other conceptualization requires alignment in the SGC-related problem framing and reporting of effects, as well as careful consideration when consolidating evidence across interventions.

Moreover, our review exposes differences in analytical purpose, manifest in how scholars frame the SGC-related problem and reported the effects. Some studies problematize a focal SGC solution (e.g., community forest management or work reinsertion programs to alleviate poverty). They subsequently explore whether and how CSPs helped overcome the challenges that the solution implied and improved its social and/or environmental results. Other studies problematize the SGC and examine whether and how CSPs helped address the social and/or environmental problem while also considering their broader societal effects. The different types of SGC-centric analysis constitute distinct

approaches for assessing CSPs. As such, the adoption of either the SGC or a solution to an SGC as a reference point requires a consistent application within a manuscript for scholars to successfully communicate their analysis and results.

On this basis, we propose a framework that serves as a stepping stone toward systematically positioning the study of CSPs (Austin and Seitanidi, 2012a, 2012b; Selsky and Parker, 2005) in the context of SGCs (Brammer et al., 2019; George et al., 2016; Howard-Grenville and Spengler, 2022). The framework demonstrates that adopting an SGC-centric perspective in scholarly analysis goes beyond a focus on societal effects (Van Tulder et al., 2016; Wickert, 2021), to incorporate the framing of the SGC-related problem and describing what is done to address the SGC (i.e., the SGC intervention). These analytical building blocks matter as they help delineate differences in scholars' analytical focus and purpose, which, in turn, influence the reporting of SGC-related results and call for alignment within the manuscript. We discuss the implications for assessing and conducting a scholarly analysis, as well as for subsequent integrative studies. Finally, we outline a future research agenda in line with the SGC–intervention–effect framework, including opportunities to learn from intervention research (O' Cathain et al., 2019; Rothman and Thomas, 1994; Sieber, 2013) in studying CSPs or other organizational forms of addressing SGCs.

## METHODS

### Systematizing the CSP Literature by Reviewing Scholarly Analyses

We conducted a systematic review to examine how management scholars empirically analyzed CSPs in addressing SGCs. Our aim was to scaffold the literature and develop a framework to help structure scholarly analysis and guide future research. This eventually led us to Post et al.'s (2020) article on how to develop theory with review articles. Specifically, our theory-generating avenue aligns with the Post et al. (2020) 'Exposing Emerging Perspectives' approach that aims to advance an emerging theoretical perspective on a management phenomenon. We contribute to advancing an SGC-centric perspective on CSPs that takes the SGC as a starting point as opposed to putting the CSP or partner organizations at the centre (Pop et al., 2023; Wickert, 2021). To this end, we elaborate the analytical building blocks of this perspective, develop a conceptual framework that organizes different types of scholarly analysis, and lay out a research agenda on furthering the emerging perspective in analytical terms. Hence, although we employ at large the 'Exposing Emerging Perspectives' approach (Post et al., 2020), we divert by focusing on the analytical dimensions of reviewed articles. On this basis, we contribute to Post et al.'s (2020) theory-generating avenues a new approach that we refer to as Review of Scholarly Analysis.

In line with Gough et al.'s (2012) continuum of aggregative and configurative reviews (see Table I), the starting point of our review of scholarly analysis resembled an aggregative review due to our focus on empirical studies. However, in the absence of a framework that delineates the underlying analytical differences and their implications, an aggregation of the reported evidence, such as with a meta-analysis (Habersang et al., 2019), would likely have produced misleading results. Hence, the purpose of this study is to scaffold scholarly analysis to enhance conceptual and analytical clarity in this

Table I. Positioning the 'review of scholarly analysis' logic

	<i>Configurative review</i>	<i>Aggregative review</i>	<i>Review of scholarly analysis</i>
Nature	Configuring (organizing) insights	Aggregating (adding up) empirical evidence	Configuring (organizing) scholarly analysis
Focus	Mapping the landscape and configuring insights	Aggregating and assessing empirical evidence	Configuring scholars' ways of analysing and communicating empirical evidence
Question	What does the body of literature say about a focal phenomenon?	What empirical evidence does the body of literature provide?	How does scholarly analysis differ and what are the implications?
Sampling	Quantitative, qualitative, and conceptual studies	Qualitative or quantitative studies	Qualitative and quantitative studies
Approach	Exploring, organizing, and interpreting insights	Seeking, interpreting, and integrating empirical information	Seeking, organizing, and understanding analytical differences
Goal	Seek concepts to innovate through new ways of understanding	Seek evidence to inform decisions	Systematize scholarly analysis and guide future research
Benefit to target audiences	Scholars: Overview and future research avenues	Scholars: Evidence to build on	Scholars: Overview of analytical diversity to guide and assess empirical research
	Practitioners: Overview and practical implications	Practitioners: Evidence to build on	Practitioners: Guidance for empirical evaluation

*Note:* Based on Gough et al. (2012).

body of literature and provide a foundation for future aggregative reviews. To this end, our review of scholarly analysis, as detailed in the third column of Table 1, includes configurative elements of mapping and organizing (Elsbach and van Knippenberg, 2020), but its focus is on the scholarly analysis of an empirical phenomenon rather than on the phenomenon itself. Next, we explain how we identified the relevant body of CSP studies in the management literature and how we examined this set of articles in line with our research question.

### Sampling – Identification of Relevant CSP Studies

*Defining CSPs.* We define CSPs as the active, collaborative engagement of business, government, and/or civil-society organizations in cross-sector projects formed to address a social and/or environmental challenge (Selsky and Parker, 2005) in which governance and implementation tasks are shared. This definition builds on Waddock (1991, pp. 482–83) who outlined that 'partnerships (...) require active interaction and involvement in the planning

and implementation of activities by two or more organizations', thus distinguishing CSPs from other forms of cross-sector interactions (Seitanidi and Lindgreen, 2010).

From this perspective, CSPs differ from multi-stakeholder initiatives (De Bakker et al., 2019) in which organizations from different sectors design a social and/or environmental standard, yet they are individually responsible for implementing the ensuing activities in their organization or supply chain. Similarly, we distinguish CSPs from collaborative governance (Ansell and Gash, 2008). In the public sector, collaborative governance refers to a forum in which one or more public agencies engage non-state stakeholders in a consultation process when defining a public policy, programme, or assets, yet the decisions and implementation remain the responsibility of the public agencies. Likewise, public-private partnerships as contractual arrangements to outsource the design, construction, financing, maintenance, and sometimes operations of public infrastructure or a public facility to the private sector (Hodge and Greve, 2007) fall short of the shared implementation criteria and do not necessarily address a social or environmental challenge. Finally, philanthropic relationships play an important role in the cross-sector interaction landscape (Seitanidi and Ryan, 2007). However, they typically do not involve joint implementation of activities as this responsibility remains with the receiving partner (Husted, 2003), thus falling outside our definition of CSPs.

*Sampling criteria.* We designed our review around five criteria. First, we were interested in *studies of CSPs* that aligned with our definition. To remove variance and enable systematic comparison, we cross-checked the descriptions of the analyzed CSPs based on the (a) cross-sector, (b) social and/or environmental challenge, and (c) shared governance and implementation criteria. Second, we focused on articles that provided *empirical insights*. We were interested in empirical studies that explored how CSPs addressed and impacted SGCs. Papers with no empirical analysis, such as conceptual and theoretical papers, were excluded.

Third, we focused on studies that *reported CSPs' effects on SGCs*; that is, insights into CSPs' positive and/or negative social and/or environmental effects. This corresponds to our ambition to establish a framework for assessing scholarly analysis of CSPs' contributions toward addressing SGCs. If a study provided at least some evidence of social or environmental effects, it was included in the review. Where these effects were not evidenced with empirical data, the article was excluded. While improved knowledge, motivation, and relationships among partner organizations may be facilitating factors for achieving social or environmental betterment (Van Tulder et al., 2016), we did not consider the respective evidence as SGC-related effects unless scholars reported the related social (e.g., social service and/or livelihood) or environmental (e.g., water management and/or greenhouse gas emission) implications.

Fourth, our aim was to draw conclusions and provide guidance for empirical work published in management studies. We thus employed a *scope and quality criterion* and limit our review to studies published in peer-reviewed English-language journals that are ranked 3, 4, or 4\* on the ABS list (Vrontis and Christofi, 2021). The ABS list 'encompass(es) a broad set of journals in which business and management academics may seek to publish their research' (Chartered Association of Business Schools, 2021). Finally, we focused on *two decades of CSP studies* in management research, starting in 2000. With the start of the new millennium, CSP practice became more prominent on a global scale, notably due

to the 'Millennium Declaration' that called for closer collaboration between the United Nations and businesses (United Nations/General Assembly, 2000). Interestingly, in academic research, the year 2000 also marked a strong increase in articles in the field of CSPs (Clarke and Crane, 2018).

*Article selection.* To identify relevant articles matching the criteria above, we conducted a keyword search in the title and abstract for CSP and SGC-related effects on four databases (see Appendix S1): Scopus, EBSCO Academic Source Complete and EBSCO Business Source Complete, ProQuest, and Web of Science. Using a keyword string search, we followed the method advocated by Cochrane Reviews (Naumann, 2007) to validate the Boolean search terms with literature search and subject matter experts. We exported each database list to Excel and removed duplicates and scrambled references. Next, we excluded articles not published in Chartered ABS list 3–4\* ranked journals and consolidated the Excel sheets in one list. After duplicates were removed, this list contained a total of 1272 articles.

Subsequently, two co-authors utilized CADIMA software to conduct an additional screening for the inclusion criteria (i.e., CSP focus, empirical analysis, and reported SGC-related effects) based on the titles and abstracts (Kohl et al., 2018). CADIMA allowed the calculation of the interrater agreement. The Cohen's kappa coefficient was 0.89, which is considered almost perfect (Landis and Koch, 1977). The screening stage reduced the list to 194 articles, which was followed by a full-text review. At least two members of the author team conducted a comprehensive review of each article, verified it against the five inclusion criteria, and resolved any discrepancies in their inclusion/exclusion decisions through discussions. This evaluation resulted in the exclusion of an additional 121 articles for one or multiple reasons: 53 per cent of these articles analyzed a type of collaboration that did not align with our CSP definition, 25 per cent did not conduct an empirical analysis, and 47 per cent did not report any SGC-related effects. For example, we excluded the article by Schalk (2017) because it did not align with our CSP definition. Although the author categorized the collaborative form as a CSP, we concluded that the interactions more closely resembled consultative stakeholder involvement in policy making rather than collaborative CSP engagement with shared governance and implementation.

*Sample description.* To describe our final set of 73 articles (see Appendix S2), we used the NVIVO software and coded the articles on contextual attributes (Miles et al., 2014). These included the characteristics of the studied CSPs, the methods and data sources used, and the publication details. This analysis showed that in approximately 75 per cent of the articles, scholars analyzed CSPs that included (among others) actors from the business sector, while public sector and civil-society sector organizations were involved in about 72 per cent of the articles respectively.<sup>[2]</sup> These CSPs operated mostly in Europe (31 per cent) and North America (25 per cent), followed by Africa (15 per cent) and Asia (15 per cent). In terms of sustainability goals, *SDG#3 Good Health and Well-being* (15 per cent), *SDG#8 Decent Work and Economic Growth* (14 per cent), *SDG#6 Clean Water and Sanitation* (10 per cent), and *SDG#15 Life on Land* (10 per cent) were the most common primary SDGs that the CSPs addressed (besides *SDG#17 Partnerships for the Goals*).<sup>[3]</sup> Overall, the majority of articles (71 per cent) used

a qualitative research design. 36 per cent analyzed a single case study, 33 per cent analyzed multiple cases, and 2 per cent used other qualitative designs. Only 17 per cent of the articles used a quantitative, and 12 per cent a mixed-method design. Appendix S3 illustrates the sample characteristics.

## Analytical Steps

To delineate the differences in scholarly SGC analyzes and their implications, we followed a four-pronged approach (see Figure 1). As mentioned in the introduction, we realized early in the analysis that making sense of the empirical evidence required more than examining the reported social and environmental effects. In a first step, we thus sought to contextualize the reported effects and systematically screened *how and for what purpose scholars discussed SGC-related insights* in their article. This analysis surfaced three building blocks essential for comprehending the scholarly analysis.

*SGC-related problem framing.* To understand the reported effects, readers need to learn about the problem to which the focal CSP is responding. The description of ‘what is the SGC-related problem’ that motivated the CSP (and, interrelatedly, the scholarly analysis) forms the starting point for our framework. Typically, this information was provided in the introduction and/or beginning of the methods section. These problem descriptions set a specific framing through which scholars highlight ‘some aspects of perceived reality and mak[e] them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation’ (Entman, 1993, p. 52). Framing conveys perceptions of ‘what is going on’ (Benford and Snow, 2000, p. 614; Snow and Benford, 1988) or, in the specific case of SGCs, what is going wrong. By highlighting some and omitting other aspects, the problem framing provides the ‘interpretive footing’ (Benford and Snow, 2000, p. 614) for the subsequent CSP analysis. It helps readers understand why and what action was needed and whether and how the reported effects related to the focal SGC.

*Descriptions of the SGC intervention.* The second building block links the SGC-related problem framing and the reported effects: information about what the partners did to address the SGC. Drawing on the literature on social interventions, we propose viewing the partners’ actions as ‘intentional change strategies’ (Fraser et al., 2009, p. 5) vis-à-vis the focal SGC; that is, as ‘purposive action that is intended to alter behavior, reduce risk, [and/] or improve outcomes’ (p. 9). As such, CSPs’ aim to address SGCs, positions CSPs as intentional change strategies. This, however, does not negate the emergence of unintended positive and/or negative effects. Instead, this conceptualization helps uncover the partners’ activities and related assumptions about why certain changes or effects are expected to emerge (Van Tulder and Keen, 2018). This includes articulations about the CSP’s aim (Bull and McNeill, 2007) and what the partners did to address the deficiencies outlined with the SGC-related problem framing.

*Reporting of SGC-related effects.* The third building block relates to the scholars’ descriptions of the CSPs’ effects on the SGC and its stakeholders. This dimension



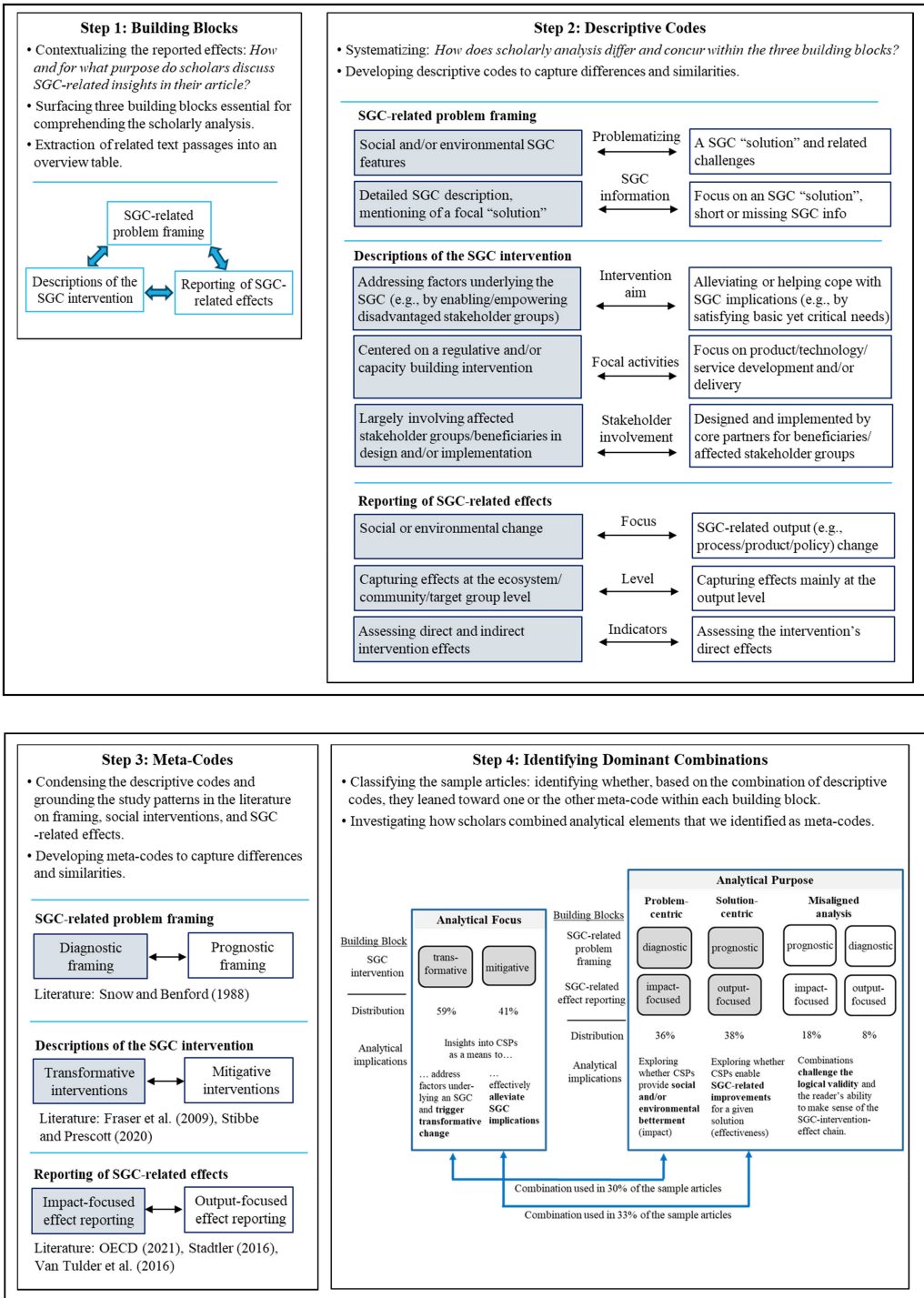


Figure 1. Illustrating the process leading to the analytical framework

captures the results that the intervention produced in relation to the SGC-related problem. For example, scholars measured and reported social and environmental effects for individual or all partner organizations and/or for individual beneficiaries, communities, eco-systems, and/or other organizations (Austin and Seitanidi, 2012b). The social and environmental effects could be positive or negative as well as intentional or unintentional (Stadler, 2016).

For each article, we extracted the respective text passages into an overview table that eventually spanned 133 pages. Densely structured along the SGC framing–intervention–effect framework, this overview enabled a systematic comparison across articles. In the second step of analysis, we used descriptive, inductive codes (Miles et al., 2014) to expose how the reviewed scholarly analyzes differed and concurred within the three building blocks. We sorted the table entries into data incidents, thereby identifying sets of sentences that conveyed a coherent point about each building block and its analysis. Regarding SGC-related problem framing, main differences emerged in what scholars problematized and the information they provided. With respect to SGC interventions, differences emerged in how scholars described the related aim, focal activities, and how the partners involved affected stakeholder groups. In terms of SGC-related effect reporting, we identified differences in what effects were reported, at which level, and how.

Based on multiple discussions between a first and second coder, we captured these differences with a set of 16 descriptive codes that recurred across the articles. In a third step, we analyzed the codes' logical connections and relatedness in emergence, and grounded the study patterns in the literature on framing, social interventions, and SGC-related effects. This allowed us to cluster the codes around six, more encompassing meta-codes that helped condense the common differences and similarities across articles (Miles et al., 2014). Together, the three analytical building blocks and their meta-codes formed an emerging tool for understanding and systematizing the key differences between the reviewed scholarly analyzes (see Appendix S4 for data excerpts that illustrate our coding structure).

Consequently, in a fourth step of our analysis, we investigated how scholars combined the analytical elements that we identified as meta-codes. This helped us identify dominant combinations and systematically capture related differences. To classify our sample articles in line with our coding structure we determined whether, based on the combination of descriptive codes, they leaned toward one or the other meta-code within each building block. While these codes are not mutually exclusive, most articles showed a strong emphasis in line with one or the other meta-code. For example, based on the authors' problematization and the SGC information provided, we categorized an article as leaning toward one side or the other of a SGC framing continuum i.e. more prognostic or diagnostic (Le Ber and Branzi, 2010). Similarly, based on scholars' descriptions of the intervention's aim, activities, and stakeholder involvement, we classified the scholarly analysis as exploring a more mitigative or transformative intervention. In the rare cases when no clear emphasis emerged as the information provided aligned with both meta-codes, we used the more encompassing code marked grey in Figure 1, Step 3.

The coding notes provided in Appendix S5 illustrate the process, including related comments, challenges, and their resolution. For each article, two coders compared

their coding, discussed any divergences, and reached an agreement. We then visualized how the articles combined the meta-codes and compared these combinations across articles. This allowed us to explore the differences in what scholars analyzed (i.e., analytical focus on different SGC interventions) and in how they crafted their analysis by intertwining specific ways of framing the SGC-related problem and reporting the SGC-related effects (i.e., different analytical purposes). Finally, we reflected on the conceptual and analytical implications of the identified differences in scholarly analysis.

## **FINDINGS – SYSTEMATIZING DIFFERENCES IN SCHOLARLY SGC ANALYSIS**

In the following section we introduce 1/ ‘analytical focus’ as a key component of scholarly SGC-focused CSP analysis that we delineate into two major types of intervention analysis (transformative and mitigative) and we further elaborate on the distribution and implications of these two types. Next, we present the second component of our framework 2/ ‘analytical purpose’ comprising two types of analysis (problem and solution-centric) and we further elaborate on the distribution and implications of the two types.

### **Analytical Focus: Juxtaposing Differences in the Analysis of SGC Interventions**

At the centre of our framework is the analysis of the organizational entities, here the CSPs, as the agentic link between the SGC-related problem and the reported effects. The focus is on what the authors describe as the CSP partners’ collective actions to address SGCs, henceforth referred to as interventions. The interventions varied in their described aim, focal activities, and involvement of affected stakeholders. By clustering the differences, we reveal a distinction between scholarly focus on primarily transformative and primarily mitigative SGC interventions.

*Transformative SGC interventions.* In analysing what we call ‘transformative’ interventions, scholars described CSPs that aimed to address factors underlying an SGC (*aim*), pursued regulative and/or capacity-building activities (*focal activities*), and involved SGC stakeholder groups/beneficiaries in their design and/or implementation (*involvement*). Common to this analytical focus was an intervention that scholars presented as designed to address multiple, often interrelated factors underlying or reinforcing an SGC. Such factors could include the destruction and overconsumption of natural resources provoking biodiversity loss (Fraser et al., 2006; Steyaert et al., 2007), unequal access to basic rights and social goods contributing to urban poverty (De Wit and Berner, 2009), and conditions exposing specific groups to increased health risks (Acosta and Haddad, 2014; Wang, 2012). Scholars described how CSPs aimed to address these deficiencies, often with a view to enabling and/or empowering disadvantaged stakeholder groups. For example, the focus was on interventions aiming to ‘benefit the poor and promote local communities’ rights,

needs, and responsibilities' (Mustalahti and Rakotonarivo, 2014, p. 199), to enable access to fresh water (Isham and Kähkönen, 2002), or to shift from food assistance to poverty reduction in addressing malnutrition (Acosta and Haddad, 2014).

Reaching this aim was portrayed as a complex endeavour in which partners combined multiple activities (Fraser et al., 2009). However, at the core of transformative interventions was typically a regulative and/or capacity-building activity. In this context, 'regulative' means that the intervention was described to regulate behavior based on joint agreements and shared governance systems. This included the collaborative development and implementation of voluntary agreements to regulate contested behavior and resolve conflicts among stakeholders over forest, land, and water use. For example, Weber (2009, p. 319) described how 'many stakeholders [...] decided to [...] search for more effective ways of governing the Blackfoot watershed [...]', including the development of a new framework for property rights. This, in turn, 'open[ed] the door to additional environmental restoration and water conservation projects' that the partners implemented together. Similarly, studies on conflicts around companies' excessive use or pollution of land and water described how partners created a forum to raise issues of concerns, pursued joint investigation visits, and collaborated on subsequent remediation and prevention (e.g., Idemudia, 2017; Scodanibbio, 2011).

In analysing transformative interventions, scholars also depicted capacity-building activities aimed at developing support structures and infrastructure for affected stakeholders. This included environmental infrastructure and cooperative structures to facilitate market access (e.g., Bitzer and Glasbergen, 2010; Trencher et al., 2014) or the creation and promotion of community centres, local health or water committees (e.g., Isham and Kähkönen, 2002), and self-help centres (e.g., Wang, 2012). Likewise, capacity-building interventions comprised urban and rural market development and economic capacity-building activities (e.g., Muller et al., 2012; Petrick and Gramzow, 2012; Powell et al., 2018).

As a third characteristic, scholars reported how the partners involved targeted beneficiaries or affected stakeholder groups in the design and/or implementation of the intervention. Such involvement included opening up the definition of regulative projects to include all stakeholder groups (e.g., Fraser et al., 2006; Weber, 2009), allowing for local adaptation of capacity-building measures (e.g., Cornelius and Wallace, 2010; Wang, 2012), and/or involving the beneficiaries as active implementation partners of capacity-building measures (e.g., Kim, 2016; Trujillo, 2018).

*Mitigative SGC interventions.* Conversely, in analysing what we call 'mitigative' interventions, scholars described CSPs that aimed to alleviate or help cope with SGC implications (*aim*). The interventions focused on developing or delivering products, technologies, or services (*focal activities*) and were designed mainly by core partners for beneficiaries or disadvantaged stakeholder groups (*involvement*). For example, in discussing the CSP aim, scholars examined how the partners worked toward mitigating the implications of a refugee crisis by offering housing, cultural, and financial services to migrants (Hesse et al., 2019), abating overfishing by developing processes to reduce bycatch (Pavlovich and Akoorie, 2010), or coping better with health threats and injuries by improving emergency services (George et al., 2015). The CSPs were expected to effectively address SGC implications, but without changing

the underlying structural conditions (e.g., working on factors underlying or reinforcing migration, fish overconsumption, pollution, or emergencies).

To achieve the mitigative aims, scholars described how CSP partners worked on product, technology, or service development and dissemination, such as innovating social services (e.g., Brogaard, 2017; Waardenburg et al., 2020), developing new therapies and drugs (Crispeels et al., 2018; Knai et al., 2015; Reypens et al., 2016; Woodson, 2016), and creating effective sustainable management products and processes (Pavlovich and Akoorie, 2010). For example, scholars examined CSPs that delivered unemployment services (e.g., May and Winter, 2007) or promoted the diffusion of information on energy efficiency strategies (e.g., Peterman et al., 2014).

As a third characteristic, descriptions of mitigative interventions depicted activities that a relatively small group of partner organizations designed and implemented for designated beneficiary or disadvantaged stakeholder groups. The focus was on leveraging these partners' important technological and issue-related expertise, such as for advancing environmental technology, implementing social services like job training, therapy, or elderly care, and developing drugs and nutrients. For instance, Crispeels et al. (2018, p. 279) analyzed how the studied CSPs engaged in 'the development process of innovative therapeutic recombinant proteins and antibody products'.

*Analytical focus: distribution and implications.* In our sample, the analysis of transformative interventions was slightly more common than that of mitigative interventions (i.e., in 59 per cent vs. 41 per cent of the articles). Across journal disciplines, the former had the highest rate in the public sector discipline, and the latter in the ethics–CSR–management discipline. Contrary to our expectations, the study of transformative CSP interventions was not more recent than that of mitigative ones (i.e., average publication year of 2013 vs. 2016). With respect to the nature of the analyzed CSPs, mitigative interventions often related to business-government-NPO CSPs (30 per cent), business-government CSPs (23 per cent), and NPO-business CSPs (17 per cent). Conversely, CSPs with transformative interventions often had citizen representatives as partners (e.g., business-government-NPO-citizen CSPs, 33 per cent; business-government-citizen CSPs, 12 per cent; and NPO-government-citizen CSPs, 12 per cent). Scholars explored CSPs' mitigative interventions mostly in Europe (50 per cent), and in the context of addressing health (30 per cent) or employment (13 per cent) challenges. The geographical spread was larger for the analysis of transformative interventions, investigated mostly in North America (33 per cent), Africa (19 per cent), Europe (19 per cent), and Asia (14 per cent) – often with a focus on clean water (16 per cent), life on land (14 per cent), and decent work (14 per cent).

We identified two main implications that the analytical focus, i.e., investigating transformative vs. mitigative interventions, has for the study design. First, scholars need to craft the SGC-related problem framing in a way that enables the readers to understand the need for and choices related to the intervention. For example, a detailed discussion of factors underlying an SGC (e.g., structural and education-related causes of poverty) rather than its implications may be misleading if scholars subsequently analyze a mitigative intervention (e.g., temporary employment that mitigates but does not help break the poverty cycle).

Second, our review suggests a need for adapting the effect reporting to the analyzed intervention. Typically, scholars assessed mitigative interventions with indicators related to the alleviation or management of SGC implications. This may include improvement of waste management (Alonso and Andrews, 2019; Pavlovich and Akoorie, 2010) or levels of self-confidence and motivation of the unemployed (Guarneros-Meza et al., 2018). By contrast, to measure the effects of transformative interventions, scholars focused on conditions underlying an SGC. For example, indicators related to producer capacity and market access in global value chains (Bitzer et al., 2008; Muller et al., 2012) or levels of awareness and preventive behavior to reduce drug use and spread of HIV and AIDS (Wang, 2012).

Assessing transformative interventions with indicators of mitigation or mitigative interventions with indicators of empowerment and structural change fails to accurately reflect the described intervention aim. This is a question of construct validity; that is, measuring what one claims or aims to measure (Gibbert et al., 2008). It could be that the partners and the general public appraised a rather mitigative intervention as transformative or that a transformative intervention had turned into a mitigative one over time. Our framework helps authors recognize such divergence or evolution and encourages them to raise it as a discussion point, including its causes and implications.

### **Analytical Purpose: Juxtaposing Problem-Centric and Solution-Centric Analysis**

Besides the differences in what CSP scholars analyzed, our review reveals differences in how the analysis was conducted. Specifically, two types of analysis emerged that expressed different analytical purposes. As is discussed in the proceeding sections in detail, the first type of analysis centred on the societal challenge and is, henceforth, referred to as a ‘problem-centric’ analysis. In the second, the focus was on a specific solution, thus we refer to it as a ‘solution-centric’ analysis.

*Problem-centric analysis.* When adopting a ‘problem-centric’ analysis, scholars introduced an SGC in greater depth (*SGC information*) and examined its social and environmental features (*problematization*). To assess the CSPs’ effects, they used evidence of social and/or environmental change, whether positive and/or negative (*focus*), that was captured at the ecosystem, target group, or community level (*level*), using indicators of direct and indirect effects (*indicators*). Such analysis started by introducing issues such as individual and societal causes or implications of poverty, diseases, or deprived communities. For example, Trujillo (2018) examined the multiple manifestations of poverty and the traces of long-standing armed conflict in Colombia to ground her CSP analysis. Wang (2012, p. 239) introduced her study by explaining how HIV and AIDS disproportionately impact marginalized populations and how ‘the multidimensional nature of HIV transmission makes it difficult to use simplistic, isolated, or single actor approaches’.

Other scholars drew attention to the social and environmental facets of deforestation, desertification, and other forms of overexploitation of land, air, and water resources. For example, Weber (2009, p. 316) explained how the Blackfoot watershed ecosystem was

‘encountering severe problems with dewatered streams [...], substandard water quality, invasive noxious weeds, and other signs of deteriorating ecosystem health’. Such framing focuses on the ‘identification of a problem’ and thereby denotes what Snow and Benford (1988, p. 200) referred to as *diagnostic framing*. It places social and environmental features at the centre and unveils underlying feedback loops. In this sense, diagnostic framing aligns with conceptualizing SGCs as social or environmental problems with inherently complex and uncertain characteristics (Eisenhardt et al., 2016; Ferraro et al., 2015).

Accordingly, scholars designed their studies to capture the social and environmental effects that the CSPs engendered. This included factors such as influences on health (Isham and Kähkönen, 2002; Wang, 2012) or livelihood among disadvantaged groups (Laeis and Lemke, 2016; Muller et al., 2012; Powell et al., 2018; Trujillo, 2018). Similarly, scholars reported effects related to ecosystem quality, protection areas, and habitat recovery (Rogers and Weber, 2010; Scott, 2015). Some scholars also noted the lack of accomplishments, such as no change in exploitive behavior (Idemudia, 2017) and insignificant environmental or livelihood improvement (Arts and De Koning, 2017). Such SGC effects were commonly captured at the target group, community, or ecosystem level. For example, in her study of poverty-alleviation CSPs, Trujillo (2018, p. 441) provides ‘evidence of value creation for the direct beneficiaries’ while showing that ‘some of these initiatives also created value for people and communities beyond those directly affiliated with the [partnership]’.

This relates to the third characteristic of such effect reporting, the use of multiple indicators to capture direct and indirect intervention effects. Direct effects occur within the immediate focus of the CSP and as a direct result of the partners’ intervention. Indirect effects emerge in response to the direct effects, frequently outside the immediate focus of the CSP (Stadler, 2016). For example, scholars combined data on more direct effects related to nutrition and stunting with insights into safe water and sanitation access, and female secondary enrolment rates (Acosta and Haddad, 2014), or combined evidence of health and behavioral change with capacity-building indicators (Wang, 2012). Scholars also combined indicators of land protection with insights into water quality, wildlife conservation, and fish recovery (Scott, 2015; Weber, 2009), or compared indicators of livelihood change with forest enhancement data (Arts and De Koning, 2017) to get a more comprehensive understanding of the SGC-related effects.

We refer to this type of effect reporting as *impact-focused* because it reflects the scholars’ interest in the longer-term consequences for the ecosystem, target group, or community, whether positive or negative. Building on Van Tulder et al. (2016) and OECD (2021), we differentiate between outputs, outcomes, and impact. Outputs refer to the particular process, goods, and services that an intervention provides. Outcomes are the benefits this intervention has for the target population. Impact encompasses the overall direct and indirect long-term effects.

*Solution-centric analysis.* Moving onto the ‘solution-centric’ analysis, scholars typically began by introducing a focal SGC solution (*SGC information*) and then problematized it by highlighting specific barriers and hurdles that the solution implied (*problematization*). In reporting SGC-related effects, they examined whether and how a CSP helped apply and

improve the solution (*what*). This was measured at the process, product, or service level (*level*) and based on indicators of an intervention's direct effects (*how*).

In line with Stadler and Karakulak (2022, p. 609), we use the term 'solution' in a non-normative way to focus on the social and/or environmental mechanism or lever that partners use to address an SGC, regardless of its eventual contribution to solving it. The solutions described in our sample comprised waste recycling (Alonso and Andrews, 2019), energy conservation (Peterman et al., 2014), and pollution control (Lin, 2019) to address environmental SGCs. Solutions to social SGCs included elderly care to address social exclusion (Godenhjelm and Johanson, 2018) or refugee integration in response to rising migration trends (Hesse et al., 2019). In the context of health, solutions involved medication (Crispeels et al., 2018; Woodson, 2016), facilitated water access (Isham and Kähkönen, 2002), and emergency care (George et al., 2015).

The solutions in our sample implied hurdles or barriers that necessitated collaborative action across sectors through CSPs. Such hurdles or barriers were relational, institutional, or organizational, including resource constraints, lack of innovation or efficiency, or complexities in governance and/or coordination. For instance, in her study of business-government partnerships, Lin (2019, p. 534) described organizational barriers to innovating pollution management technologies, such as the unpredictability of related business benefits. Other scholars discussed challenges related to making residential or community care more efficient and sustainable (e.g., Gazley, 2010; Godenhjelm and Johanson, 2018). Similarly, challenges related to drugs and medication were among the key problems discussed in health studies. For example, Crispeels et al. (2018, p. 274) introduced their study by highlighting 'the public need for research on drugs in order to improve quality of life and life expectancy. [...] [However], [...] companies [...] are increasingly challenged by stiffening competition in markets that are strongly driven by profit maximization'. Some scholars contextualized the discussion by providing some insights into the underlying SGCs, but many did not.

This approach to SGCs resembles what Snow and Benford (1988, p. 201) refer to as *prognostic framing*: a focus on 'solutions to the problem but also to identify strategies, tactics, and targets'. Accordingly, scholars prioritized the challenges related to a focal SGC solution and often skipped a diagnostic framing of the underlying social and/or environmental SGC. Prognostic SGC framing aligns with a more solution-centric definition of 'grand challenges', which focuses on eliminating specific critical barriers that 'if removed, would help solve an important societal problem with a high likelihood of global impact through widespread implementation' (George et al., 2016, p. 1881).

Scholars typically used a solution-centric analysis to assess whether and how CSPs helped apply and improve the solution. This implied assessing whether CSPs were effective and/or efficient in developing and/or delivering the focal solution. To this end, scholars captured effects at the output (e.g., process, product, or service) level, based on indicators of the intervention's direct effects. Output-focused evidence included evidence suggesting improvement or deterioration of a solution's quality and scale. For example, scholars analyzed the applicability and reach of employment programs (Brogaard, 2017; Hesse et al., 2019), response time and transport characteristics of an emergency care project (George et al., 2015),



tolerance, effectiveness, and affordability of diets and medication (Crispeels et al., 2018; Knai et al., 2015; Woodson, 2016), and the environmental benefits of new waste management and pollution control tools and processes (e.g., Lin, 2019; Pavlovich and Akoorie, 2010). With a focus on solutions, these studies mentioned the resulting social and/or environmental outcomes for the target group or ecosystem only briefly or not at all, and did not evaluate the long-term impact. We refer to this type of effect reporting as *output-focused*.

*Analytical purpose: distribution and implications.* Problem- and solution-centric analyzes were almost equally utilized in our sample (36 per cent and 38 per cent respectively). The former was more common in the fields of ethics–CSR–management, social sciences, and regional studies–planning–environment, while the latter emerged primarily in public sector journals, as well as ethics–CSR–management journals. The use of the solution-centric analysis was more recent than the problem-centric one (i.e., average publication year was 2014 vs. 2016). With respect to the nature of the analyzed CSPs, scholars often used a problem-centric analysis to explore NPO-business CSPs (35 per cent), for CSPs located in Africa (39 per cent), and for CSPs in the context of clean water, life on land, or decent work (12 per cent respectively). Conversely, scholars often applied a solution-centric analysis to business-government-NPO CSPs (29 per cent), to CSPs positioned in Europe (50 per cent), and those that focused on challenges related to health and wellbeing (32 per cent) or decent work (14 per cent).

Differentiating between problem- and solution-centric analysis matters for at least three reasons. First, they serve different purposes. A problem-centric analysis helps explore the impact of a CSP's intervention in applying a certain solution, including the positive and negative, intended and unintended effects. As the OECD (2021, p. 11) outlines: 'The impact criterion goes beyond effectiveness and encourages considerations of the big "so what" question'. A problem-centric analysis may show evidence of improved health (Isham and Kähkönen, 2002; Wang, 2012), livelihood among disadvantaged groups (Muller et al., 2012; Powell et al., 2018; Trujillo, 2018), or environmental improvement (Rogers and Weber, 2010; Scott, 2015). By investigating multiple indicators of direct and indirect effects, it is also more likely to expose (often unexpected) negative effects, such as health risks, income insecurity, or social tensions arising from CSPs' poverty alleviation interventions (De Wit and Berner, 2009; Laeis and Lemke, 2016; Mustalahti and Rakotonarivo, 2014; Vestergaard et al., 2020).

On the contrary, a solution-centric analysis allows scholars to examine whether CSPs help improve processes and develop better outputs for a given solution from a social and/or environmental perspective. This evaluative purpose is focused on effectiveness by examining the extent to which a CSP reached its solution-related objectives (OECD, 2021). In our sample, this was typically defined in terms of the solution's quality and reach. Such a focus may reveal positive results, such as suggesting a high eco-innovation scale (Lin, 2019) and creative upcycling processes for waste (Pavlovich and Akoorie, 2010), as well as disappointing results. For example, some studies showed that only a low percentage of CSPs achieved social service innovation (Brogaard, 2017; Godenhjelm and Johanson, 2018) or energy-related output (Szulecki et al., 2011). Similarly, a comparative analysis by Crispeels et al. (2018) suggested that

successful medication emerged from companies' unilateral projects rather than from their CSPs with public organizations.

Second, to achieve these evaluative purposes and guide the reader through the study, these analyzes require that the SGC-related problem framing and effect reporting are intertwined (as done in 74 per cent of the sample studies). The absence of an SGC-related problem framing prevents the reader from understanding the purpose of the analysis, while a mismatch with the effect reporting sets a misleading (e.g., solution-centric) interpretive foundation of the (e.g., problem-centric) analysis. Likewise, a mismatch in effect (i.e. effect reporting) (e.g., a solution-centric effect reporting following a problem-centric SGC framing) fails to close the loop with the presented SGC issue. Overall, these patterns, identified in 26 per cent of the sample studies, pose a challenge to the study's logical validity (Gibbert et al., 2008) and impede the reader's ability to make sense of the SGC–intervention–effect chain.

Third, we found that scholars mainly used solution-centric analysis to explore (what they describe as) mitigative interventions (33 per cent of the sample studies) and problem-centric analysis to explore transformative interventions (30 per cent of the sample studies). This could be because in many transformative interventions, the CSP partners do not follow a standard solution to start with (Gerlak and Heikkila, 2011; Ostovar, 2019). Instead, the solution may emerge during the collaboration process. Conversely, given the lower complexities of and blueprints available for mitigative interventions, respective CSPs may be initiated with a specific, often scalable solution in mind (Brogaard, 2017).

However, building on a small set of pioneering studies in our sample, we encourage scholars to also analyze mitigative interventions with a problem-centric view and investigate their social and environmental implications for the target group, community, and/or ecosystem. Even though no transformative change is expected, such an evaluation can reveal unexpected positive or negative side effects (e.g., Sakarya et al., 2012; Vestergaard et al., 2020) and question whether the adopted solution and related interventions are the most appropriate ones in terms of scale and quality to mitigate the SGC implications (Chorianopoulos and Tselepi, 2019). Similarly, analysing transformative interventions with a solution-centric view may reveal deficiencies in and/or ways to improve internal processes for better SGC-related outputs (Gerlak and Heikkila, 2011).

## DISCUSSION

CSPs have become a prominent organizational form to address SGCs (Howard-Grenville et al., 2014; Koschmann et al., 2012; Selsky and Parker, 2005; United Nations, 2015). While calls for consolidating the empirical evidence are surging (Clarke and Crane, 2018; Van Tulder et al., 2016), we suggest that understanding the analytical differences manifest in the CSP management literature is an important, yet insufficiently acknowledged prerequisite. Analytical choices influence the results and thus need to be acknowledged when assessing, comparing, and integrating evidence of SGC-related effects. By reviewing a set of 73 empirical articles, we set out to

develop a framework that helps management scholars make consistent and informed analytical choices, assists readers in understanding the reported effects, and provides guidance for structuring future integrative studies. To this end, we derive the building blocks of taking an SGC-centric perspective in organizational analysis (George et al., 2016; Wickert, 2021; Wickert et al., 2021) and elucidate the main analytical choices and their implications. We next discuss our contributions to the CSP literature and management research on SGCs more generally, followed by implications for future research.

### **Contributions to Research on CSPs and SGCs**

We propose an analytical framework that advances research on CSPs and management research on SGCs more broadly by (1) helping to contextualize and map different SGC analyzes, (2) introducing the concept of SGC interventions and their mitigative or transformative nature (i.e., analytical focus), and (3) helping juxtapose solution- and problem-centric SGC analyzes and their distinct roles in CSP assessment (i.e., analytical purpose).

First, as our review demonstrates, SGC-related evidence calls for greater contextualization. We provide the building blocks of an analytical framework for scholars to effectively communicate their SGC analysis. By framing the SGC-related problem, authors create an interpretive foundation (Benford and Snow, 2000, p. 614) for understanding why an intervention is needed and which SGC-related features are central to the analysis. Likewise, by explaining what the CSP partners did to address the SGC, authors help readers establish the link between the SGC and the reported effects. Finally, the SGC effect reporting closes the logical loop between the SGC-related problem framing and the described intervention. By outlining these building blocks, our review helps readers, reviewers, and editors make sense of and assess the reported evidence. It also encourages authors to provide related information. For instance, in about 18 per cent of the reviewed articles, information about the SGC-related problem as a starting point was absent, making it difficult for readers to understand the reported effects.

Second, by positioning CSPs as the agentic link between the SGC and the reported effects, the framework encourages scholars to consider CSPs as SGC interventions. This conceptualization goes beyond viewing CSPs as cross-sector structures or processes from inside (e.g., Bryson et al., 2015; Selsky and Parker, 2005) and examines them as entities that interact with the social and/or environmental facets of SGCs (Dentoni et al., 2018; Van Tulder and Keen, 2018). Similar to research on social interventions that focuses on explaining the processes leading to outcomes (Fraser and Galinsky, 2010; Rothman and Thomas, 1994), the central process variable and focus of analysis becomes what the partners do to address the SGC. This puts the spotlight on questions about the intervention choice, planning, context-specific tailoring, and implementation (OECD, 2021), which need to be considered in the SGC context. By directing the focus to the SGC-CSP interface, such an analysis thereby complements process dimensions surrounding the role of trust, governance, and commitment (Gray and Purdy, 2018; Quélin et al., 2017), as well as leadership, tensions, and conflicts

(Ashraf et al., 2017; Cloutier and Langley, 2017; Huxham and Vangen, 2000) within the CSP boundaries.

Our review draws attention to how scholars describe SGC interventions. On this basis, the review helps explain and conceptually ground two types of CSP positioning: CSPs as transformative interventions to address factors contributing to an SGC and initiate transformative change (see also Dentoni et al., 2018; Gray et al., 2022; Van Tulder and Keen, 2018), and CSPs as mitigative interventions to assist governments, businesses, and/or civil-society organizations in alleviating the SGC implications and helping affected stakeholders better cope with them (e.g., Bryson et al., 2015; Huxham and Vangen, 2000).

Given their distinct SGC-related aims and nature, we propose that these CSP types be considered as two separate elements in the SGC 'toolkit' and analyzed accordingly. Comparing or integrating CSP studies without distinguishing between mitigative and transformative CSP interventions may, given their different aims, lead to skewed results. Moreover, our framework may assist scholars in maintaining analytical coherence in their research. Misalignment between the SGC-related problem framing, the effect reporting, and the intervention's nature may, among others, result from editors' or reviewers' preferences for a specific conceptualization. Our framework provides guidance for authors to check and defend their analytical choices.

While there is evident conceptual and analytical value in distinguishing between transformative and mitigative CSPs, the question arises as to whether this distinction implies or should imply a value judgement. CSPs with transformative interventions may take a long-term perspective in addressing multiple, often interrelated factors underlying an SGC (Clarke and Crane, 2018), whereas mitigative interventions may temporarily alleviate severe SGC-related effects (e.g., Brogaard, 2017; Hesse et al., 2019). Thus, both types of interventions are pertinent and valuable. This aligns with Stibbe and Prescott from The Partnering Initiative (2020, p. 13), who recently asserted that 'not all development could or should be transformational in nature'. Rather, in some situations transformative interventions are unsuitable or even unfeasible, such as in the immediate aftermath of natural disasters and in other highly volatile situations.

However, considering the alarming developments linked to, for example, climate change (e.g., Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2023) or social inequalities (e.g., Oxfam, 2022), CSPs that focus solely on alleviating SGC implications may create the false impression that progress is being made. For as long as no progress is made in discourse to clearly define whether CSPs target breakthrough progress or remedies, the latter is likely to continue diluting the sense of urgency required for more transformative actions to occur. Given the capacity to span multiple sectors, CSPs hold the potential to tackle SGCs through more complex transformative interventions (Clarke and Crane, 2018).

Third, by exposing differences in how scholars analyze SGC interventions, our review helps juxtapose solution-centric and problem-centric analyzes that serve different purposes and address different questions. The former examines whether CSPs help apply and enhance a given solution from a social and environmental perspective, whereas the latter considers whether a CSP intervention has resulted in social and/or environmental betterment for the target group, community, and/or ecosystem.

Both types employ an SGC-centric perspective (Pop et al., 2023; Wickert, 2021) by taking either the SGC or a related social or environmental solution as analytical reference point. They, thereby, differ from what are known as the organizational and CSR perspectives in CSP analysis (Van Tulder et al., 2016). The latter take the CSP or a focal firm as their point of departure and adopt a more instrumental view by, for example, analysing how companies may benefit from CSP engagement (e.g., Seitanidi and Crane, 2009; Wassmer et al., 2014) or focusing on the partner interactions (Van Tulder et al., 2016).

While the CSR and organizational perspectives have their merits in helping understand the challenges and dynamics of the partnering process or company engagement, they fail to explicitly link these to the SGC and its related effects. This is why many CSP studies were excluded from our sample. For example, 54 per cent of the studies that were excluded after the full-text review did not report any SGC-related effects (whether in terms of outputs or impact). To address this gap, the proposed framework offers guidance for authors in adopting an SGC-centric perspective and helps ensure internal alignment of their SGC-related problem framing and effect reporting. For scholars aiming to integrate existing evidence, the problem- vs. solution-centric distinction provides an effective approach to conducting cross-study comparisons and mapping them according to their analytical purpose, thus assessing insights into CSPs' effectiveness versus impact.

### Implications for Future Research

The proposed analytical framework entails numerous implications for SGC-related inquiry in CSP research, and for organizational scholarship more generally. We discuss the implications next, alongside suggestions for future research avenues (see Table II for a summary).

*Building on the framework.* For scholars interested in studying SGC-related effects, our review stresses the importance of alignment. This means aligning the case or sample selection with the conceptualization of the organizational intervention as primarily mitigative or primarily transformative to ensure construct validity. It further means aligning the SGC-related problem framing and effect reporting for internal consistency. Paying attention to alignment is critical for scholars working with primary data, as well as for the sampling of appropriate studies when designing the much-needed integrative literature reviews on SGC-related effects.

While we developed our framework in the context of CSP analysis, future research may explore its application to research on other forms of organizational SGC interventions. This may include the study of social enterprises and hybrid organizations (Akemu et al., 2016), NPOs and international organizations (Ambos and Tatarinov, 2022), public agencies and projects (Bryson et al., 2014), companies' unilateral CSR initiatives (Aguinis and Glavas, 2012; Wickert, 2021), and SGC-related inter-firm collaboration (Marques, 2017). Moreover, we need to acknowledge that this framework emerged from a review of (and for) studies in management journals. It would be interesting to explore how other disciplines (e.g., studies in natural science, social work, education, and medicine and health) analyze

Table II. Suggestions for leveraging the framework in future SGC research

<i>Research implications</i>	<i>Research avenues</i>
<i>Leveraging the framework</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Differentiating between mitigative and transformative interventions and adjusting the focus in SGC-related problem framing and effect reporting</li> <li>• Aligning the SGC-related problem framing and effect reporting when adopting a problem- or solution-centric analysis</li> <li>• Assessing scholarly analysis with an SGC-centric perspective</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What conclusions about CSPs' effectiveness can be drawn when integrating evidence of transformative versus mitigative interventions in line with the suggested framework?</li> <li>• (How) Does the framework differ for other organizational forms and their SGC interventions?</li> <li>• How does scholarly analysis of SGC interventions differ in non-management journals? What opportunities does this provide for management scholars?</li> </ul>
<i>SGC-related problem framing</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoiding 'solutionism' that omits examining the SGC before introducing a focal solution and related challenges</li> <li>• Opportunities for interdisciplinary dialogue when crafting the SGC-related problem framing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When and why do actors fall into 'solutionism' and to what effect?</li> <li>• What synergies and/or trade-offs emerge when organizations seek to address a combination of SGCs?</li> </ul>
<i>SGC intervention</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acknowledging the intervention's aim, focal activities, and key actors involved</li> <li>• Considering an intervention's relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability</li> <li>• Being attentive to intervention changes over time and adapting the analysis accordingly</li> <li>• Respecting an intervention's life cycle stage when exploring SGC effects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do actors agree on an intervention? How is this process interdependent with their understanding of the SGC?</li> <li>• How are beneficiaries and disadvantaged stakeholder groups involved in different intervention types?</li> <li>• How do organizations connect with interventions targeting other facets of the SGC (e.g., multiple CSPs integrated within one programme)?</li> </ul>
<i>SGC-related effect reporting</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Linking evidence of effects back to the 'what is going wrong' description of the SGC-related problem framing (i.e., closing the SGC analysis loop)</li> <li>• Putting investigated effects into perspective vis-à-vis the focal SGC</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How and why do SGC interventions produce undesired or unexpected effects?</li> <li>• What evidence do we have for the effectiveness of mitigative interventions and impact of transformative interventions?</li> </ul>

CSPs with respect to their SGC-related effects. For instance, how do they use and/or combine problem- and solution-centric analyzes? Alternatively, is their way of communicating SGC-related analysis substantially different?

*SGC-related problem framing.* To communicate SGC-related effects effectively, it is important to start with information about the SGC-related problem. Such SGC framing plays an informative function and signals what kind of analysis will follow. Our review shows the need to align the SGC-related problem framing with the chosen SGC intervention and the intended SGC effect analysis. Moreover, scholars need to reflect on the references (e.g.,

scholarly articles, media, personal experiences) used to build their SGC framing. Crafting the SGC description offers an excellent opportunity for interdisciplinary investigations and scholarly interactions (Buckley et al., 2017). Similarly, presenting different partner or stakeholder perspectives may be necessary to understand the SGC more fully (e.g., Steyaert et al., 2007; Weber, 2009).

When adopting a solution-centric analysis, we recommend that scholars support their prognostic SGC framing by briefly introducing the underlying social or environmental SGC before discussing the challenges related to the focal solution. This helps avoid what Chalmers (2021) describes as ‘solutionism’: The liberal application of a focal solution or intervention to a wide range of SGCs without considering their particularities. An explicit exploration of the conscious or unconscious adoption of solutionism among CSP partners may help explain why and how CSPs fall short in delivering expected impact. Additionally, it is necessary to reflect on the boundaries of both prognostic and diagnostic framing with respect to SGCs’ interconnectedness (Dentoni et al., 2021; Van Tulder and Keen, 2018). The scope of the intervention that the partners target can offer guidance in this regard. At the same time, interesting research avenues are opening up for exploring how organizations target a combination of SGCs (Karakulak and Stadler, 2022). Such a focus can help expose potential synergies, trade-offs, and (inter-)organizational implications.

*A focus on SGC interventions.* To enhance our understanding of how actors address SGCs, insights from social intervention research may provide valuable inspiration (O’Cathain et al., 2019; Rothman and Thomas, 1994). Such research draws attention to the process and related choices that shape an intervention and its effects. How do partners decide which facets or which SGC to address, decide on the suitability of one solution over another, and finally craft an intervention? In this respect, investigating which stages are involved, what information is being used, and what role pilot testing and experimental evaluation play in this process is likely to provide constructive insights (Rothman and Thomas, 1994). Building on a pioneering set of studies (Cloutier and Langley, 2017; Eden and Huxham, 2001; Stadler and Karakulak, 2022), scholars may investigate, for example, how a shifting understanding of the SGC may prompt adaptations to SGC interventions and, eventually, SGC-related effects.

On this basis, scholars may reveal the underlying assumptions and development approaches (Van Tulder and Keen, 2018). For example, several articles in our sample analyzed CSPs for community development, assuming that greater economic growth would be a lever for attaining other objectives, such as social inclusion. However, social and economic improvement goals may conflict at some point (e.g., Klitsie et al., 2018; Reficco and Márquez, 2012; Trencher et al., 2014). Future research could explore which organizational forms and processes, in combination with which interventions, allow for achieving both social (and/or environmental) and economic benefits, and under what conditions.

Furthermore, intervention research encourages us to move beyond a focus on effectiveness and impact. As the OECD (2021) recently suggested, criteria of relevance, coherence, efficiency, and sustainability might be equally important to give a holistic picture of an intervention and its results. Relevance relates to the extent to which an intervention’s objectives and design respond to the beneficiaries’ needs and priorities, coherence

addresses the extent to which it supports or undermines other interventions, efficiency questions whether results were delivered in an economic and timely way, and sustainability questions the extent to which the benefits endure (OECD, 2021).

For example, in analysing an intervention's relevance, scholars may explore different solutions to be applied (e.g., recycling vs. upcycling to address resource constraints and biodiversity loss) and compare different interventions (e.g., offering upcycling activities vs. creating an upcycling community infrastructure). Moreover, the following questions may provide helpful research avenues: How do the interventions incorporate the views and actions of the people they will affect (O'Cathain et al., 2019)? How are they involved in the design, planning, shaping, and implementation of interventions (Le Ber and Branzei, 2010; Trujillo, 2018)? How can their involvement be enhanced and how does this differ in regulative, capacity-building, and product or service-centric interventions? Finally, which organizational structures are best suited for promoting ongoing cooperation and coordination in providing these types of interventions?

The resulting evidence could help develop a context-specific understanding of concepts of co-creation and co-production (Voorberg et al., 2015), including the reasons why an intervention matches or does not fully match the SGC conditions (Arts and De Koning, 2017; De Wit and Berner, 2009; Mustalahti and Rakotonarivo, 2014; Thorpe, 2018). For example, is the problem mainly perceived as a matter of changing the beneficiaries' behavior, or is it a question of providing support capacities, infrastructure, and changing power structures, and why? How do partners coordinate their intervention with other existing or upcoming interventions to ensure its coherence? And how sustainable is the intervention? Mitigative interventions may require an ongoing flow of resources to continuously improve people's lives or to preserve the environment, whereas transformative interventions may help transform an unsustainable situation into a more sustainable one (Stibbe and Prescott, 2020). Both interventions, however, require a certain degree of continuity which may conflict with the temporal timeline that actors may have set for a CSP or other form of organizing. Consequently, which form of organizing may be more suitable and efficient for different forms of interventions?

Finally, a focus on what actors do to address an SGC may help us gain intervention-related insights into what can go wrong. For example, Sieber (2013) outlines seven mechanisms that can cause regressive effects. They include functional disruption when interventions overemphasize one need at the expense of another, goal displacement when an auxiliary goal becomes the intervention's ultimate goal, and overcommitment when resources are inadequate to complete a task and the failure leaves matters worse than before (Sieber, 2013). How might these mechanisms play out more or less strongly in different organizational forms?

*Reporting of SGC-related effects.* Capturing and discussing SGC-related effects is key to developing society- or SGC-centric research. As Wickert (2021, p. E2) suggests for CSR research: 'a society-centric focus widens the theoretical and topical lenses, with scholars asking questions such as "How and when does CSR improve societal-level outcomes such as social and ecological conditions and create welfare for society at large?"'. This requires a re-evaluation of the selection of dependent variables and,



as our review demonstrates, alignment with the SGC-related problem framing and analyzed intervention.

The large number of articles that we excluded from our analysis due to a lack of SGC effect reporting demonstrates a tendency in CSP research to assume rather than assess SGC-related effects. There is an underlying assumption about the societal relevance of CSPs that still needs to be addressed. However, mirroring the views in the context of, for example, social entrepreneurship (Chalmers, 2021) and social enterprises (Akemu et al., 2016), this is no easy task. While Van Tulder et al. (2016) outline the key challenges of SGC effect analysis, such as the lack of baseline metrics, evolving goals, the complexity of spill-over effects, and attribution problems, our review reveals two additional challenges: the question of timing and of sources of data used. First, for 45 per cent of the analyzed articles, we did not find any indication of how long the CSPs had been operating at the time of analysis. Indicating the CSP life span is critical for interpreting the SGC-related effects, for both solution-centric and problem-centric analyzes.

Furthermore, we encourage researchers to move beyond partner self-evaluations as used in seven studies in our sample. Gazley's (2010) analysis of CSPs providing social services showed that perceived SGC-related effects tend to be overrated compared with the actual effects. To ensure alignment between the SGC intervention and effect reporting, scholars could incorporate external (i.e., third-party) evaluations, which donors and public partners increasingly require for the interventions they support. Scholars then have an opportunity to close the loop and reconsider the achieved SGC-related effects in light of their SGC-related problem framing. Which SGC facets have been successfully addressed and which have not? What are the implications?

This relates to our final point: We encourage scholars to carefully consider what conclusions can be drawn from their analysis. First, this could imply an investigation of whether the CSPs achieved their social and/or environmental goals or failed to do so (see e.g., Arts and De Koning, 2017; De Wit and Berner, 2009). Why did they achieve results, or not, and what are the (broader) implications? For example, Choriantopoulos and Tselepi (2019) show how governments' focus on CSPs led to a fragmentation of social interventions and thereby weakened their capacity to address the multiplicity of challenges related to social inclusion. Second, given the complexity of SGCs (Ferraro et al., 2015), scholars could draw attention to CSPs' potential negative effects that a set of studies has started to capture (De Wit and Berner, 2009; Laeis and Lemke, 2016; Mustalahti and Rakotonarivo, 2014; Vestergaard et al., 2020).

Likewise, we invite scholars to consider the CSP aims and achievements in relation to the SGC and the related change needs. For example, Bitzer et al. (2008) concluded that CSPs in the coffee chain provided an important stimulus of change but were unable to turn the value chain into a sustainable one. Similarly, Edge and Meyer (2019) concluded that the CSP they investigated served an important role in addressing food insecurity but could not address the community's overall food security problems. Putting CSPs and their achievements into perspective of the SGC would remind authors and readers that SGCs are grand, and that their geographical and temporal scope often transcends that of a CSP (Alonso and Andrews, 2019; Sakarya et al., 2012). Therefore, it is relevant to further investigate how organizational actors

acknowledge these boundaries and interlink CSPs with other initiatives, and to what effect.

We hope our review provides guidance and inspiration for advancing SGC-related inquiry in CSP and organizational scholarship, thus promoting SGC-centric views in management research (Wickert, 2021).

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## NOTES

- [1] We use the term ‘SGC-related effects’ to broadly encompass all forms of social and/or environmental effects, positive and negative, occurring to the partners, other organizations, the targeted beneficiaries, the community, and/or the ecosystem. We explore the differences with more specific terminology (e.g., output, outcome, and impact) later.
- [2] Based on the partner constellation mentioned in the article’s analysis of the first CSP.
- [3] Based on the characteristics of the first CSP’s primary goal, as discussed in the article’s analysis.

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