

Corporate Social Responsibility and Irresponsibility

Call for Papers for *JBR* Special Issue

Deadline: February 15, 2012

Coca Cola has sold products in African markets for some time. Recently, the corporation began supporting local communities where conducting its business activities. Coca Cola now helps small retail entrepreneurs to build up their business and become partners with the company in order to create economic wealth in these poor countries. Critics contend that the major motive of Coke's actions is to increase sales of an unneeded product. Which assessment of Coca Cola is more accurate?

Walmart currently is promoting its environmental and socially responsible activities. For example, the company has new trucking procedures in place and altered distribution centers to become more energy efficient and supports local communities by donating money for children's summer camps and schools in regions where Walmart operates. The firm's many detractors suggest that Walmart does not always act in a socially responsible manner. They point to the company's history of squeezing suppliers, undercutting small local shops and paying sub-market wages to employees in the name of low prices. Has Walmart fundamentally changed its business model?

During the 2010 oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, BP faced extreme criticism for its socially irresponsible behavior. This incident harmed many people from local community, far flung businesses on the Gulf, and the environment in terms of wildlife and native habitats. Not many years before the incident, BP was commended for being at the forefront of social responsibility and concern for future energy needs. What caused the apparent change in philosophy at the company?

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become a key part of the management agenda of many companies. Companies often go to great lengths to promote their good works. As the examples above show, some firms behave irresponsibly while at the same time acting positively on some dimensions—corporate social irresponsibility (CSI) and responsibility can exist at the same time in the same firm. This paradox of acting both responsibly and irresponsibly reveals a kind of CSR-CSI ambidexterity and is a major phenomenon the call for papers is addressing.

Looking at the history of CSR, academic debate on what CSR is and how to define CSR is never ending. While Milton Friedman and Theodore Levitt (1958) promote the argument that companies are only responsible for maximizing profits and shareholder value, other CSR scholars suggest that companies have a broader range of obligations than financial ones (e.g., Carroll, 1974; Van Marrewijk, 2003). The debate continues on with many definitions of CSR and a host of related concepts. CSR is a cluster concept which overlaps business ethics, corporate philanthropy, corporate citizenship, sustainability and environmental responsibility. CSR is a dynamic and contestable concept that embeds in each social, political, economical and institutional context" (Crane et al., 2008). Consequently, a clear paradigm for CSR is still missing (McWilliams et al., 2006). Armstrong (1977) advocates focusing not on CSR but rather social irresponsibility because CSI is much easier to delineate what corporations and managers should not do. Armstrong defines corporate socially irresponsible behavior as "a decision to accept an alternative that is thought by the decision makers to be inferior to another alternative when the effects upon all parties are considered" (Armstrong, 1977, p. 185).

Some managers and corporations act irresponsibly as the recent examples of the world financial crisis, BP's actions in the Gulf, the nuclear industry in Japan point in this direction. Managers sometimes behave irresponsibly when they consider only their selfish interests and aim mainly to maximize shareholder profits without considering other stakeholder interests.

Consequently, shareholder orientation encourages while stakeholder orientation reduces irresponsible behavior (Armstrong, 1977). Thus, stakeholder theory offers guidance to companies and managers' for CSR by recognizing the need to take into account stakeholder groups. This theory is also very influential in clarifying for *whom* a corporation is responsible (Freeman, 1984). But stakeholder analysis fails to address a rather critical issue: for *what* a corporation is responsible. This question is important for management in making appropriate decisions relating to CSR, and marketers in developing suitable communication strategies about CSR. Clarifying the "*for what*" issue inevitably leads to an exploration of the limits of CSR and the occurrence of CSI.

The Editors of this *JBR* Special Issue welcome conceptual and empirical papers exploring these and related themes:

- Are universal definitions of CSR and CSI desirable?
- What are the boundaries of CSR and CSI?
- For what reasons and in what contexts are companies responsible/irresponsible?
- Can progress be made in developing a general theory of corporate social irresponsibility
- What criteria should be used to contrast CSR with CSI?
- Is CSR masking/hiding illegal and/or irresponsible behavior?
- What are the arguments of the critics of CSR and CSI?
- How does culture or national origin affect CSR and CSI policies?
- How does CSR and CSI relate to "useful" breaking of the law?
- How can damage of irresponsible behavior be prevented/reduced/controlled for?
- How can corporations and government create effective programs to prevent corporate irresponsible behavior?
- How can/should CSR and CSI be measured?
- What competitive advantages (if any) are achievable by a coherent CSR or CSI strategies?
- Does CSR and/or CSI force business to lead government?
- What is CSR's and CSI's potential to reduce reputational risk?
- Can CSR and CSI serve as an insurance against product harm crises?
- What is the impact of CSR and CSI on stakeholders (e.g., stockholders, consumers or employees)?
- How do CSR programs address sustainability concerns?
- How do supply chain members participate in the CSR activities that involve major multinational firms?
- What is the level of consumer understanding and skepticism towards CSR and CSI?
- How do firms communicate CSR and CSI priorities to stakeholders?

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Submissions: Papers should be sent in WORD format to one of the special issue editors by February 15, 2012. The papers should comply with the *Journal of Business Research* guidelines.

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