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Series: Critical Studies on Corporate Responsibility, Governance and Sustainability, Vol. 4 & 6

**Corporate Social Irresponsibility: A Challenging Concept, Vol. 4
(Adrián Zicari)**

**Communicating Corporate Social Responsibility Perspectives and Practice, Vol. 6
(Ralph Bathurst)**

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**Corporate Social Irresponsibility: A Challenging Concept. Series:
Critical Studies on Corporate Responsibility, Governance and
Sustainability, Vol. 4
Ralph Tench, William Sun and Brian Jones, 2012, Emerald Group
Publishing Limited, 315 pages**



By Adrián Zicari

The book “Corporate Social Irresponsibility: A Challenging Concept” brings a fresh perspective on the much discussed issue of social responsibility in business. The Editors of this volume (Ralph Tench, William Sun and Brian Jones) propose the idea of Corporate Social Irresponsibility (CSI) as a subject of academic inquiry. CSI would represent the very minimum behavior to be avoided, either because it is illegal or because it is clearly unethical. CSI would be a much clearer notion (what companies should *never* do) than Corporate Social Responsibility - CSR (what companies should *ideally* aim to do). CSR would be instead a vague concept, difficult to agree upon. Moreover, the easiest grasp of CSI would have practical consequences for business, public policy and stakeholders at large. It is far easier for managers to firstly focus on CSI in order to avoid it rather than looking for hard-to-achieve CSR performance.

The Editors prepared a remarkably consistent collection of twelve chapters. While all chapters were written by different authors, they all share a coherent focus on CSI. I particularly liked the first chapter (by Timothy Clark and Kristen N. Grantham) which builds a strong case for focusing on CSI. The authors contend that greater social benefit would be achieved from prioritizing CSI reduction rather than focusing on CSR. The ethical issues of a controversial industry (defense) are analyzed by N. A. J. Taylor, while Alex Nunn calls for a Marxist critique of CSR: irresponsible behavior would not be an isolated phenomenon but the logical consequence of capitalistic competition. In a different approach, Peter Stokes brings back the Aristotelian view on character, focusing on moral choices made by individuals in a precise context.

The second part of this volume focuses on the social construction of CSI. In an insightful chapter, Paul Manning challenges the classical assumption of human beings as self-interested individuals focused on utility maximization alone. Furthermore, Manning contends that this reductionist view not only fails to explain reality but it also justifies amoral choices. A narrow view on humanity would end up in a self-fulfilling prophecy. By the same token, a richer understanding of human behavior would open up ways for a more humanistic management.

Following in this second part, Clea Bourne brings a fresh view on rating agencies and CSI. Drawing on the works of Anthony Giddens and Michel Foucault, she theorizes on rating agencies as “producers” of trust for capital markets. Jennifer Barlett, Steve May and Oyvind Ihlen explore how corporate communication shapes our understanding of what companies are responsible (and not responsible) for. After reading this chapter one understands why in many cases CSR activities are managed by Public Relations departments. In a very innovative study, Audra R. Diers investigates the response of BP after the Gulf of Mexico spill. I particularly appreciated the methodology deployed in this study, which could inspire other researchers interested in the dialogical relationship between a company and its stakeholders.

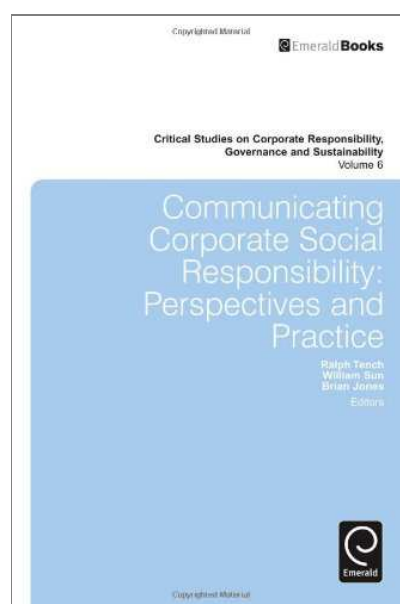
The third part of the book examines specific issues in CSI. Nicole Marie Lindsay studies the challenges faced by the mining industry in Canada. Being this country one of the world leaders in extractive industries, the social and environmental impact of Canadian mining

firms is highly relevant at a global scale. N. Lindsay contends that self-regulation initiatives are not enough; and that they could be a “recipe for irresponsibility”. She proposes instead a middle-way between classical regulation and voluntary approaches.

This third part of the book also includes two very interesting chapters about oil companies in Africa. Firstly, Trish Glazebrook and Matt Story present the case of an oil company that had operations in the Sudan. This chapter raises many interesting issues about corporate culture and the internationalization of corporate charters. Additionally it is a very useful example of a case study based on legal documents (e.g. judgments delivered by American courts). Secondly, Olusanmi C. Amujo, Beatrice Adeyinka Laninhun, Olutayo Otubanjo and Victoria Olufunmilayo Ajala study the reputation of multinational oil companies in Nigeria. This chapter offers practical guidance for reputation management in extractive industries. Finally, Brad S. Long offers an insightful criticism about corporate downsizing. He emphasizes the position of employees as legitimate stakeholders in the corporation, a notion which is frequently forgotten. Downsizing should only be used as last resource and even if it needs to happen, companies have to do their best in order to protect their employees (e.g. training, outplacement). I feel that this chapter should be a recommended reading for Executive Education and MBA programs.

This new book is scientifically rigorous yet it offers a wealth of practical insights. While it has been written for an academic audience, curious managers will also profit from many thoughtful ideas. As it normally happens in any collective book, each reader will be more interested in some chapters than in others. But all chapters without exception follow a coherent pattern: each one of them supports the notion of CSI as a pressing issue that merits further attention. In conclusion, the Editors succeeded in presenting CSI as “a challenging concept” to the academic community. I do hope that scholars all over the world (particularly the younger ones) will be inspired by this nascent stream of research.

Communicating Corporate Social Responsibility Perspectives and Practice. Series: Critical Studies on Corporate Responsibility, Governance and Sustainability, Vol. 6
Ralph Tench, William Sun and Brian Jones, 2014, Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 456 pages



By Ralph Bathurst

A text about communicating corporate social responsibility (CSR) seems at first glance to be redundant. Indeed, CSR has become a popular concern *because* of the need for companies to trumpet their positive impact on social well-being. This volume, the sixth in a series of critical studies on Corporate Responsibility, Governance and Sustainability, focuses on theoretical and practical viewpoints and foregrounds processes and critiques of communication strategies.

Critics of CSR argue that rather than actually being socially responsible, corporations tend to only talk about their ideas, publicizing their beliefs in public forums through brochure ware, websites, social media and annual reports. These public pronouncements are designed to

demonstrate that a company is behaving ethically as a good citizen. However, this may just be mere talk, as companies seek ways of legitimizing their goals through the clever use of rhetoric (Ditlev-Simonsen & Wenstøp, 2011), but with no supporting actions to give their words substance. When they do communicate it is to serve only 'narrow business interests' (Mason & Simmons, 2014, p. 77) without taking into consideration wider societal impacts. What is the evidence, then, for organizations communicating what they actually do rather than making aspirational claims (Ofori, 2007)? This volume addresses this question by bringing together rhetoric and behaviour.

One of the ways in which language and action may come together is explored by Dhanesh (pp. 157–177 of the volume) in her discussion on the importance of dialectics and dialogue. Here the binary distinctions between 'talk' and 'walk' may be resolved by holding them both together dialectically. Thus actions (praxis) inform reflection which in turn enriches the ways in which organizations carry out their affairs. In this way talk (dialogue) becomes an important component of organizational behaviour. By increasing the complexity of the communicative environment, multiple discourses (polyphony) form the warp and weft of an organization's communication strategies.

This raises the problem of communication as an embodied activity (Mark-Ungericht & Weiskopf, 2007). If corporate leaders are to communicate effectively, how might that occur and how might audiences be invited to respond to such communication? Ihlen, May and Bartlett (pp. 25–39 of the volume) explore this question by advocating for dialogue inside and outside the organization. The chapter enriches the field through a change in orientation from one-way communication (where a company broadcasts its good works to the community) to a more dynamic process involving 'reciprocity, propinquity, empathy, risk and commitment' (p. 30). All these dialogic elements require that communicators (marketers and managers for instance) understand the cultural dynamics of their local context. It is this need, therefore, to be connected and engaged that underpins Chia's chapter which discusses responsiveness (pp. 41–58 in this volume).

This book's practical value can be seen in Fredricksson and Olsson's piece which offers a model for evaluating communication (pp. 111–130 in this volume) and Levashova's chapter which explores the case of a tobacco company (pp. 131–153 in this volume). In both these offerings, readers are invited to bridge the gap between theory and practice, a useful exercise for leaders who desire that their organizations become more socially active.

The 21st century has seen the rise of social media and virtual reality as powerful tools of communicating ideas and democratizing organizations. This text embraces some of the communication paradoxes inherent within this digital environment (Part IV, pp. 259–333 in this volume). The potential for communication to individual citizens on a global scale, impossible in previous generations, has now made available through a raft of online platforms such as Google, Facebook and Twitter. However, social networking sites still lack the governance structures necessary for the protection of intellectual capital and the privacy of individuals as they seek to critique the political forces at work in specific locales. Therefore there is an apparent contradictory need to both preserve the pluralist democratic values inherent in social media sites as well as the homogenizing need for the reinforcement of generalised social norms.

Alongside these global issues this text also focuses on specific cultural phenomena, and in particular Muniapan and Raj's chapter which discusses religious elements from the *Vedanta* (pp. 337–354 in this volume). This chapter's orientation towards Hindu beliefs makes a valuable addition to the literature of the importance of world religions on understandings of the social responsibilities of corporations. This study of spirituality is complemented by Therofilou and Watson's chapter (pp. 355–379 in this volume) which argues that resisters of CSR may indeed become unintended advocates. Here the authors make a compelling case for word-of-mouth communication as a potent tool for public relations practitioners to understand the complex environment within which they work.

In sum this is a useful text bringing together conversations about the practice of communication by institutions: discussions on discourses and their impacts on CSR development and communication which focus on all the implicated stakeholders. The range of epistemologies, methods and models offered makes it a mine of information for researchers, students and practitioners who are seeking to become more alert to the

communication strategies currently deployed in organizations. Critical reflections on those strategies, particularly by exploring the complexities of communication, enrich this developing field.

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