

Book Review: Corporate social responsibility: from concept to management

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Corporate social responsibility (CSR) reigns in many areas of social life, increasingly adopted and recognized. It is not a new phenomenon, as it has been around for decades. Currently, however, it is a topic of recurring conversations. Firms, media, consumers, shareholders and a long etcetera - stakeholders in general - value it more and more.

Its preeminence should not go unnoticed. Many firms consider that CSR should be equally as important as company profits or income. Worldwide, important social revolts are taking place, among which we can highlight, by no means an exhaustive list, Hong Kong, Chile and Argentina. Society demands change and improvements in their lives, in short, solutions to their problems. Such voices or grievances call for reflection by politicians, public regulators, firms, and organizations as a whole. There is profound inequality, the climate crisis is real, and automation is increasing everywhere.

In short, the future of our planet and its inhabitants is in a dire state of emergency. Recently, the Business Roundtable, which is one of the main lobbies in the United States, issued a statement ending a policy that was defended since the late 1970s. This policy, argued by Milton Friedman, claimed that the goal of the firm is to maximize profits to shareholders and that the sole responsible is to the shareholder. Today, and for several decades, it is recognized that more attention should be paid to workers, suppliers, and the communities in which they interact. The benefit must be of a social nature. There are those who consider it a starting axiom. In other words, it has even been pointed out, along these lines, that, for companies to operate, they should clearly

indicate in their statutes what their social benefits will be. It is not a trivial issue. It is a matter that affects us all.

CSR is not a new aspect, as we said, nor foreign to firms. It must be present in all the actions that firms carry out. It is not merely a matter of publishing an annual report in accordance with GRI (Global Reporting Initiative) standards that accompanies the financial statement of the company.

As reality shows, we live in the era of the Internet of Things (IoT), artificial intelligence, big data and other no less notable advances. We live in a world where everything is interconnected and everything goes viral - think, in this sense, of the power of social networks. In short, everything is interconnected with everything else. CSR should be linked to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda. Among other things, as known, they refer to eradicating poverty, empowering women, using water sustainably, reducing inequality, and fighting climate change.

CSR should not, therefore, be a tangential aspect for firms. It must occupy a central place and influence all decisions. It is as significant as short-term profits or expansion into high profitability markets. Firms must work towards growth that is profitable but also sustainable. It must be realized that they are not the be-all and end-all. In other words, they exist to help people outside of the company, in different areas. The most consolidated firms over time have generally been characterized by a certain sensitivity to the social climate of their time.

Dr. Barrio, author of the monograph reviewed, has a doctorate in advertising and public relations and has extensive experience in the field of communication. In addition, she is a researcher and academic at the Autonomous University of Barcelona.

The work has five chapters, each with its own bibliography, which we will briefly discuss below. As noted in the foreword, CSR is not a passing phenomenon but, rather, here to stay. It presents the added advantage of its usually low economic cost compared to the benefits from the point of view of corporate reputation and the internal brand it elevates.

The first chapter, introductory and conceptual in nature, highlights the rise of CSR. Among the causes leading to the social responsibility boom are advances in the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector, people's distrust of corporations, environmental degradation, globalization and ethics. The systematic analysis of the profitability of CSR, based on different stakeholders, is especially thought-provoking. Being honest and responsible has a favorable effect on corporate reputation.

The second chapter refers to the diversity of doctrinal opinions surrounding CSR. However, given the lack of unanimity, the author identifies their commonalities to subsequently develop her own definition. This chapter also delves into the principles and dimensions of social responsibility. Especially provocative is the assessment regarding its possible role in improving neighbor relations, a concept that, in turn, would encompass two planes. First, it involves not behaving in ways that would harm a neighborhood. Second, and related to the first, it assumes that these activities should be expressed as the optional acceptance of the duty to help solve the handicaps that may eventually arise in a neighborhood.

The phenomenon of CSR should not be confused with figures that could be similar, although they are not. The third chapter is dedicated to that issue. The author correctly identifies the differences between them. There may be some confusion regarding cause marketing, social action, philanthropy, or ethics. For a long time, CSR has been confused with philanthropy. A good portion of managers have operated with misguided idea of CSR. They thought that it had to do with the social projects that their companies carried out, through their foundations, and not with the way in which their societies gained their income. It is about the observance of the law, human rights and caring for the environment. For a long time - even to this day it continues - the actions of CSR have been more tied to, if possible, the areas of communication. Communication reveals what is being done, regarding public issues, to improve the relationship with the environment or even with business foundations.

The last two chapters address the CSR management process. They include the dynamic model, which analyzes each of the stages (environmental assessment; planning; implementation; monitoring and control; communication; and feedback), and outline the professional profile that should manage the process. In this last sense, according to the author of the work, the most appropriate position for managing CSR is the director of communication.

Above all, it should not be forgotten that boards of directors must observe both CSR and sustainability under Community Directive 95/2014 regarding nonfinancial and diversity information, transposed into Spanish by Law 11/2018 of Article 529 ter. 1, a) of the Corporate Enterprises Act and the Good Governance Code of Listed Companies. The Corporate Enterprises Act states the following: "The board of directors of listed companies may not delegate the decision-making powers referred to in Article 249 bis nor specifically the following: approval of the strategic or business plan, the management objectives and annual budget, investment and financing policy, corporate social responsibility policy and dividend policy". Note that the board of directors is responsible for overseeing and evaluating the relationship processes of a company with stakeholders. Likewise, it should be taken into account that following the articles of the Corporate Enterprises Act and the Good Governance Code of Listed Companies, the role of the board of directors stands out (in terms of oversight, evaluation and content), which is why CSR applies. Furthermore, the Law on Non-Financial and Diversity Information should also be considered.

We have here a reference work in this field, a comprehensive journey with respect to CSR and its management, which is easy to read and provides perspective and rigorous content in its approaches. CSR is a type of revolution in which it is the firms and consumers who are paving the way. Boards of directors themselves must be cognizant of the new CSR reality.

Only if there is a complete and transparent connection between the values presented by the company, which are part of what could be called its DNA, and those exercised by CSR will genuine value be created. However, if inconsistencies reveal themselves, trust in the company will undoubtedly be affected and lead to harmful behavior.