Social responsibility

Social responsibility is an ethical framework and suggests that an individual, has an obligation to act for the benefit of society at large. Social responsibility is a duty every individual has to perform so as to maintain a balance between the economy and the ecosystems. A trade-off may exist between economic development, in the material sense, and the welfare of the

society and environment,[1] though this has been challenged by many reports over the past decade.[2][3] Social responsibility means sustaining the equilibrium between the two. It pertains not only to business organizations but also to everyone whose any action impacts the environment.[4] It is a concept that aims to ensure secure healthcare for the people living in rural areas and eliminate all barriers like distance, financial condition, etc.[5] This responsibility can be passive, by avoiding engaging in socially harmful acts, or active, by performing activities that directly advance social goals. Social responsibility must be intergenerational

since the actions of one generation have consequences on those following.[6]

Businesses can use ethical decision making to secure their businesses by making decisions that allow for government agencies to minimize their involvement with the corporation.[7] For instance, if a company follows the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) guidelines for emissions on dangerous pollutants and even goes an extra step to get involved in the community and address those concerns that the public might have, they would be less likely to have the EPA investigate

them for environmental concerns.[8] "A significant element of current thinking about privacy, however, stresses "self-regulation" rather than market or government mechanisms for protecting personal information".[9] According to some experts, most rules and regulations are formed due to public outcry, which threatens profit maximization and therefore the well-being of the shareholder, and that if there is not an outcry there often will be limited regulation.[10]

Some critics argue that corporate social responsibility (CSR) distracts from the fundamental economic role of businesses;

others argue that it is nothing more than superficial window-dressing, or "greenwashing";[11] others argue that it is an attempt to pre-empt the role of governments as a watchdog over powerful corporations though there is no systematic evidence to support these criticisms. A significant number of studies have shown no negative influence on shareholder results from CSR but rather a slightly negative correlation with improved shareholder returns.[12]

Corporate social responsibility

Corporate social responsibility or CSR has been defined by Lord Holme and Richard Watts in the World Business Council for Sustainable Development's publication "Making Good Business Sense" as "...the continuing commitment by business to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as the local community and society at large." CSR is one of the newest management strategies where companies try to create a positive impact on society while doing business. Evidence suggests that CSR taken on voluntarily by companies will be much

more effective than CSR mandated by governments.[13] There is no clear-cut definition of what CSR comprises. Every company has different CSR objectives though the main motive is the same. All companies have a two-point agenda—to improve qualitatively (the management of people and processes) and quantitatively (the impact on society). The second is as important as the first and stake holders of every company are increasingly taking an interest in "the outer circle"-the activities of the company and how these are impacting the environment and society.[14] The other motive behind this is that the companies

should not be focused only on maximization of profits.

While many corporations include social responsibility in their operations, it is still important for those procuring the goods and services to ensure the products are socially sustainable. Verification tools are available from a multitude of entities internationally,[15] such as the Underwriters Laboratories environmental standards, BIFMA , BioPreferred, and Green Seal. Developing a reputation aligned to social responsibility is linked to higher profits, particularly when firms voluntarily report

the positive and negative impacts of their social responsibility endeavors [16]

These resources help corporations and their consumers identify potential risks associated with a product's lifecycle and enable end users to confirm the corporation's practices adhere to social responsibility ideals. A reputation for Social Responsibility leads to more positive responses toward a brand's products by inducing a reciprocal desire to help companies that have helped others, an effect that is more prominent among consumers who value helping others and

is reduced if consumers doubt a firm's intentions [17]

Scientists and engineers

One common view is that scientists and engineers are morally responsible for the negative consequences which result from the various applications of their knowledge and inventions.[18][19][20][21][22] After all, if scientists and engineers take personal pride in the many positive achievements of science and technology, why should they be allowed to escape responsibility for the negative consequences related to the use or abuse

of scientific knowledge and technological innovations?[23] Furthermore, scientists and engineers have a collective responsibility for the choice and conduct of their work. Committees of scientists and engineers are often involved in the planning of governmental and corporate research programs, including those devoted to the development of military technologies and weaponry.[24][25] Many professional societies and national organizations, such as the National Academy of Science and the National Academy of Engineering in the United States, have ethical guidelines (see Engineering ethics and Research ethics for

the conduct of scientific research and engineering).[26] There is recognition that scientists and engineers, both individually and collectively, have a special and much greater responsibility than average citizens with respect to the generation and use of scientific knowledge.

It has been pointed out that the situation is, unfortunately, not that simple and scientists and engineers should not be blamed for all the evils created by new scientific knowledge and technological innovations.[18] First, there is the common problem of fragmentation and diffusion of responsibility. Because of the intellectual

and physical division of labor, the resulting fragmentation of knowledge, the high degree of specialization, and the complex and hierarchical decision-making process within corporations and government research laboratories, it is exceedingly difficult for individual scientists and engineers to control the applications of their innovations.[27] This fragmentation of both work and decision-making results in fragmented moral accountability, often to the point where "everybody involved was responsible but none could be held responsible."[28]

Another problem is ignorance. The scientists and engineers cannot predict how their newly generated knowledge and technological innovations may be abused or misused for destructive purposes in the near or distant future. While the excuse of ignorance is somewhat acceptable for those scientists involved in very basic and fundamental research where potential applications cannot be even envisioned, the excuse of ignorance is much weaker for scientists and engineers involved in applied scientific research and technological innovation since the work objectives are well known. For example, most corporations conduct research on

specific products or services that promise to yield the greatest possible profit for share-holders. Similarly, most of the research funded by governments is mission-oriented, such as protecting the environment, developing new drugs, or designing more lethal weapons. In all cases where the application of scientific knowledge and technological innovation is well known *a priori*, it is impossible for a scientist or engineer to escape responsibility for research and technological innovation that is morally dubious.[29] As John Forge writes in *Moral Responsibility and the Ignorant Scientist*: "Ignorance is not an excuse precisely

because scientists can be blamed for being ignorant."[30]

Another point of view is that responsibility falls on those who provide the funding for the research and technological developments, which in most cases are corporations and government agencies. Furthermore, because taxpayers provide indirectly the funds for government-sponsored research, they and the politicians that represent them, i.e., society at large, should be held accountable for the uses and abuses of science.[31] Compared to earlier times when scientists could often conduct their own research

independently, today's experimental research requires expensive laboratories and instrumentation, making scientists dependent on those who pay for their studies.

Quasi-legal instruments, or soft law principle has received some normative status in relation to private and public corporations in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) *Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights* developed by the UNESCO International Bioethics Committee particularly in relation to child and maternal welfare.[32]

(Faunce and Nasu 2009) The International Organization for Standardization will "encourage voluntary commitment to social responsibility and will lead to common guidance on concepts, definitions and methods of evaluation."[33]

See also

- Accountability
- Collective responsibility
- Corporate social responsibility
- Inclusive business
- SA8000
- Shareholder primacy

- Social enterprise
- Social entrepreneurship
- Socially responsible investing

Notes

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