

CSR, Sustainability, Ethics & Governance

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Disciplining the Undisciplined?

Perspectives from Business, Society
and Politics on Responsible Citizenship,
Corporate Social Responsibility
and Sustainability

 Springer

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ISSN 2196-7075 ISSN 2196-7083 (electronic)
CSR, Sustainability, Ethics & Governance
ISBN 978-3-319-71448-6 ISBN 978-3-319-71449-3 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-71449-3>

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017964285

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Printed on acid-free paper

This Springer imprint is published by Springer Nature
The registered company is Springer International Publishing AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

Foreword

The socially and economically transformative agendas of CSR, sustainability, and ethical and responsible management and business practice are fundamentally disruptive. Disruption is currently most often associated with technological change and the so-called gig economy although with the underlying ‘business as usual’ principles of unlimited economic growth and profit maximisation essentially unaltered. However, the suite of social change agendas of ethics, CSR and sustainability (ECSRS) constitute a paradigm shift and hence are not compatible with traditional ‘business as usual’ management and business practice nor traditional ‘business as usual’ university education. For that reason, ECSRS cannot be a mere single add-on subject or course (no matter how rigorous, valuable and relevant that individual subject or course may be), while the mainstream curriculum of higher education remains essentially unchanged. ECSRS and responsible management and business must be integrated across the whole curriculum as a central and core element of twenty-first century university education, destabilising and challenging the paradigms of traditional practice.

While acknowledging its positives, globalisation presents challenges for business and management but also for national governments, regulators and educators. Economic globalisation is associated with footloose capital and examples of multinational and transnational firms seeking to minimise taxation liabilities through complex and innovative financial arrangements, which, while legal, prove to be ethically problematic. The globalisation of manufacturing, production and sales has resulted in complex international supply chains with many companies unable to determine whether their products or components have been produced in an environmentally unsustainable fashion, or through the exploitation of workers.

Issues such as child labour—regulated in the West since the nineteenth century—and modern slavery are re-emerging as issues for firms in developed countries although sustainable and ethical investment portfolios are increasingly identifying these practices as screens. At the same time, the United Nations’ suite of ECSRS charters—the Global Compact, Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) and the Responsible Investment Principles—which address

ethics, sustainability, corporate governance and particular issues including child labour—demonstrate that the tensions between traditional business as usual and ECSRS principles are increasingly being challenged.

The twentieth century overturned assumptions that environmental damage was an unfortunate but unavoidable by-product of economic progress and development and saw the development of new and emerging industries necessary and appropriate for a sustainable and post-carbon economy. ECSRS agendas, however, threaten existing hierarchies and relations of power, privilege and influence. Thus, there is no inevitability that in the twenty-first century the ECSRS movement for business and industry and for business schools will be successful in overturning assumptions of infinite economic growth or that the sole business of business should be profit and shareholder value.

University education develops students' understanding of the world and instils particular values, identities and ethical orientations. The challenge for business schools, and universities more broadly, is to decide which values and which ethical identities are prioritised in the curriculum. This is not to suggest that business schools should proselytise one-sided perspectives, but rather that through their teaching, research and community engagement they provide a rigorous and critical engagement with both ECSRS principles and the assumptions of traditional business. Such an approach is consistent with the long-established focus of universities upon developing their students' analytical and critical thinking capacities.

The contributors to this collection rigorously address these challenges from a range of disciplinary perspectives including politics, environmental science, anthropology and philosophy as well as several business-related disciplines such as economics, marketing and public relations. Their forward-oriented and positive perspectives provide hope for the future—for our students, for our societies and for our planet.

School of Business and Governance
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7 August 2017

Janice Dudley

Preface

A restructuring process at Murdoch University in 2013 brought about the formation of the School of Management and Governance (since renamed to School of Business and Governance), merging the university's business school with the areas of politics, sustainability and security studies and bringing together traditionally disparate disciplines. Following the formation of the new school, a group of academics formed an interdisciplinary working group with a view to foster teaching and research collaboration across the newly merged disciplines. Members of this group then formed the Centre for Responsible Citizenship and Sustainability (CRCS) in 2014, building on the foundations of the former Institute for Sustainability and Technology Policy (ISTP) and the Institute for Social Sustainability (ISS) at Murdoch University. Today, the Centre is a multidisciplinary hub for teaching and research in the areas of business, politics, security studies and sustainability, reflective of the broad disciplinary variety within the School of Business and Governance.

Central to the mission of the CRCS is the advancement of teaching and research in areas at the heart of key global challenges and that are relevant to future university graduates and society at large. In this context, questions arose, however, how concepts such as corporate social responsibility (CSR), responsible citizenship and sustainability are understood and conceptualised by Centre members from different disciplinary backgrounds.

After what started off as informal roundtable discussions among some CRCS members, seeking to create a shared understanding of these concepts a more vigorous debate ensued involving a growing number of scholars. In order for members to learn from each other and recognise alternative viewpoints, a Delphi approach was used with the aim also to enable a more structured communication around definitional issues. The results of this process have since been published (Brueckner et al. 2017).

This edited volume, which underwent double-blind peer review, is a product of ongoing discussions had since among CRCS members to explore in more depth the disciplinary readings of these important—albeit heavily contested—concepts. The

attempt was made to not only explore their different meanings and interpretations but also to show how these concepts can be made teachable and more accessible for research. The process of producing an edited volume on this topic helped us create a better understanding of our disciplinary differences but importantly also reminded us of the role of higher education and the importance of generating and transferring knowledge in these areas and their associated value sets.

Murdoch, Australia
Murdoch, Australia
Murdoch, Australia

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Reference

Brueckner M, Spencer R, Paull M, Girardi A, Klomp S (2017) Journeying towards responsible citizenship and sustainability. In: Arevalo JA, Mitchell SF (eds) Handbook of sustainability in management education: in search of a multidisciplinary, innovative and integrated approach. Edward Elgar, Northampton, pp 364–384

Acknowledgements

While writing can be a solitary task, books are not written without outside support. We therefore wish to thank all contributing authors for their valuable input and their commitment to this project. Further, we are indebted to the international panel of 25 anonymous reviewers from countries as far away as South Africa, Germany, the UK, Spain and Canada for the double-blind peer review of the contributed chapters in this volume. We also acknowledge the support of Murdoch University's School of Business and Governance, especially in today's neoliberalised higher education environment where academic performance metrics discourage collaborative and transdisciplinary work such as this. Finally, we express our gratitude to Springer for supporting this book project and their invaluable editorial guidance.

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