Book Review

Corporate Social Responsibility
Strategy, Communication, Governance

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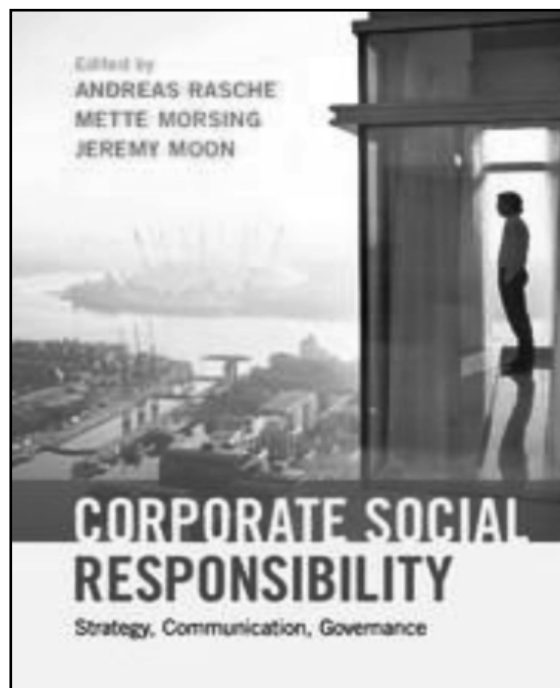
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Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) refers to the integration of an enterprise's social, environmental, ethical and philanthropic responsibilities towards society into its operations, processes and core business strategy in cooperation with relevant stakeholders. It is often conceptualized as an alternative and more pragmatic way to regulate the conduct of private actors in a global economy, especially as national and international legal frameworks remains limited in many respects. Although CSR remains primarily a voluntary construct, focused on self-regulation exercised by multiple stakeholders, it offers a point of orientation for companies while thinking about their social and environmental responsibilities. Such orientation is required as corporate increasingly operate in a global playing filed which is characterized by a heterogeneous set of norms, values and interests.

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Due to their increased size and reach, corporations contribute significantly to some of the world's most vital social and environmental problems, such as overfishing of the oceans, water scarcity, violation of human rights, corruption and deforestation. While business activity is at the heart of these problems, private businesses are also increasingly seen as part of the solution. The United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals, launched in 2015, which cover key targets such as ending poverty, safeguarding gender equality and ensuring sustainable management of natural resources, emphasises the importance of capacity-building through the private sector. Corporations are increasingly seen as reliable partners that mobilize resources and voluntarily comply with new standards.

This textbook offers an original and topical approach and introduces issues in CSR from a global perspective. It guides readers through key themes in CSR including strategy, communication, regulation and governance. Combining practical coverage with theoretical grounding and reflection, it provides a balanced discussion of the critiques of CSR as well as its potential to create opportunity.

This book takes the readers on a journey to study CSR against the background of the changing role of business in global society. The blurring of boundaries between the public and private, and the rise of the digital economy are just two important examples of how the roles and responsibilities of corporations in global society are changing. The introduction chapter looks at how globalization has impacted CSR. Then the authors discuss how best to frame CSR in conceptual terms and how to understand its relationship to other concepts such as corporate citizenship and sustainability. The next section debates why firms engage in CSR, especially when considering the changing context of doing business.

The book is divided into four parts. The first part comprising five chapters discusses about the link between strategy and CSR. The chapters in this section show that CSR and strategy can be related in different ways. Business strategy can be used as a justification for CSR; it can be seen as part of the rationale for CSR; and it can also be seen as one way to conduct CSR. There are firms that believe CSR is irrelevant to their strategic orientation. This leads them to view responsible business as purely philanthropic activity without any concern for their core competencies. On the other, there are firms that deeply embed CSR into their strategic orientation and hence make changes to their competitive environment. Digitization is a key issue when it comes to stakeholder thinking, as it introduces virtual stakeholders and also changes the way we think about firms' responsibilities towards society.

The second part titled "The Regulatory Dynamics of CSR", have four chapters. CSR is regulated by actors and mechanisms outside the company. The chapters in this part examine more specific forms of regulation shaping contemporary CSR, reflecting CSRs shift from complete to partial organization, and its internationalization which brings new forms of industrialization beyond its national configurations. These forms of regulation vary in nature: from NGO threats to corporate reputation and legitimacy; through forms of partnership that businesses enter with other businesses, NGOs and governments (including for standards and non-financial reporting systems); to incentives and rules devised by governments to encourage and shape CSR.

Part three titled "Communication and CSR" have four chapters. The authors in this part of the book discuss corporate social responsibility as a new area, reflecting the emerging CSR literature's response to the increased demand on companies to be more explicit and transparent about their CSR activities. CSR communication is most often linked to the way that companies present their CSR activities to external audiences in advertising, marketing campaigns or CSR reports. The positive association of CSR will lend itself to improve the corporate image. However, in practice many companies have experienced such communication attracting attention from skeptical stakeholders who criticize the company for not doing enough or for doing the wrong things. Communication in CSR is 'double edge'; CSR communication is necessary, but has reputational risk. With the rise of social media, different stakeholders take part in the conversation about CSR of companies.

The fourth and final part of the book titled "The Governance of Transnational Issues" has four chapters. It broadly discusses about the underlying issues that corporate manage while addressing CSR. Further it emphasises the real-life issues such as labour rights, and corruption etc. The authors in this part have depicted the presence of widespread corruption and the preventive measures that the companies can undertake. In another chapter the authors have identified the factors influencing dissemination of environmental performance demands across the value chain. In the last chapter the authors have highlighted the labour rights in global supply chains. Driven by

highly publicized scandals such as Nike in the 1990s and the Bangladesh Rana Plaza factory collapse in 2013, the authors outline what kind of labor rights violations are common in factories that supply to global branded companies. It shows that CSR problems can be evaluated from quite different moral points of view.

Every chapter is supplemented by 'learning objectives' in the beginning and 'questions for discussion', 'chapter summary' and 'chapter questions' along with 'further resources' at the end of the chapter. The text book contains 18 case studies, 7 figures, 35 Tables, 12 boxes in addition to name index, subject index, glossary on CSR and related concepts, and a list of exhaustive references which makes the book unique. At last, an epilogue by Jonas Haertle, succincts the importance of the subject in general and the book in particular for the future generations. As Haertle narrates "Not only do these topics reflect global issues that the next generation of business leaders will continue to face as they make decisions and develop strategy, but they also reflect elements of individual Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are part of the ambitious Agenda 2030 agreed upon by all 193 United Nations member states to guide us to the world we want by 2030, including ending poverty and living within the planet's ecological limits."

Overall, this book offers more than the text. It presents eighteen chapters which both link to one another and can be used in a standalone fashion. These scholarly contributions are supplemented by a variety of other resources, including: reflection pieces by well-known practitioners on the four major themes; case studies at the end of the chapter to enable students and readers to critically reflect on CSR opportunities, challenges and dilemmas; and access to the slides that have been prepared in collaboration with the chapter authors. The efforts taken by editors in compiling this book are admirable. The new dimensions discussed in this book will help generate substantive debate on CSR among the research community and other stakeholders and contribute to its evolution.