

## **European Business Review**

### **Special Issue Call for Papers**

#### **“The dark side of CSR: Causes, constraints and consequences of (un)delivering the promise”**

Guest Editors

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The concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) has received significant attention over the past few decades. Both academics and industry experts acknowledge the importance of CSR for organisations: including its impact on their growth, reputation and relationship building with key stakeholders (Kaul & Luo, 2018; Lee, Zhang & Abitbol, 2019; Tang, Hull & Rothenberg, 2012). Yet, the CSR concept remains controversial, and doubts persist over the actual benefits of socially responsible practices for business and wider society, and sincerity of business concern for society (Ellen et al., 2006). Critics have argued that CSR is too incremental, uneconomic, and peripheral (Visser, 2011), lacking transparency and that CSR masks (Moratis, Melissen & Idowu, 2018) or even legitimises (Schneider, 2020) business' shadowy practices.

As a management practice, CSR was created in the 1920s to keep free markets and prevent society from the destructive impact of a global capitalism (de Bakker, Matten, Spence and Wickert, 2020). Business conformity to CSR, their commitment to creating more public good and correcting the negative impact of corporate behaviours has increased over the past two decades but so has the corporate social irresponsibility (CSiR) (Mazutis, 2018) with many economic, legal, environmental, and social problems being witnessed today.

Media reports significant issues related to the misuse of CSR by large enterprises, thus making this debate worthy of exploring in detail both in theory and practice. Recent investigations carried out by the BBC's One Panorama (2022a,b) journalists provide evidence of business practices' lack of integrity and genuine concern for their key stakeholders at various organisational levels from operational to senior management. Over the past few decades, CSR has become a buzz word. It is used by organisations to raise their profits, brand image and reputation (Hur, Kim & Woo, 2014). While profitability is always welcomed, celebrated and viewed as an essential component for business survival (Carroll, 2016), the means to achieving financial success may come at the expense of stakeholders' health, wealth and wellbeing.

Some research argues that ambiguous practices create tensions between businesses and stakeholders (Maon *et al.*, 2019), yet the issue is far more complex and prevails not only at a micro but also at mezzo and macro-levels. Recently, de Bakker et al. (2020) called to investigate the impact of systemic constraints on business and organisational practices. The decisions made at a macro level invoke certain and not always desirable actions and responses at mezzo and micro levels. Indeed, Schneider (2020) argues that CSR fails due to the wrong approach being used: instead of changing practices and behaviours at the micro-level we need to fix the problem at the macro-level and shift our attention to the capitalist system and its shortcomings. However, many would agree that to change an economic

governing system is deemed impossible. So, what can we all do as stakeholders? Corrective measures can be put in place (Schneider, 2020), and the debate can continue at theoretical and empirical levels to propose changes for practice and advice for policy makers on how to tackle these challenges, so businesses are better equipped to meet and comply with essential business ethics standards.

To achieve this objective, it is important to critically evaluate CSR practices and explore what constraints big and small businesses encounter when seeking acceptable means to create public good and compensate society for the losses. Perhaps a fresher look is also needed towards the suitability and practicality of CSR frameworks and asking questions whether they fully capture the current challenges of small and large businesses and the changing business landscape. How helpful they are from a practical side and whether various business problems can be cured with existing frameworks? To address this issue, we can begin to adapt and change not only CSR models and frameworks but theories and practices by first examining sufficiently and systematically the underlying causes of the growth in irresponsible business practices (Mazutis, 2018).

#### List of Topic areas

The following questions can help to start a conversation and research on the dark side of CSR, and initiate a call for more responsible business practices:

- What problems do small and large businesses encounter when (seek to) implementing CSR practices?
- How well and ethically do corporations diminish their negative footprint and support the directly affected stakeholders and a wider society?
- Are current sanctions and fines effective in reducing pollution, discrimination and abuse at various levels caused by corporate actions and activities?
- Is reliance on managerial discretions within corporations sufficient to meet the rising public expectations in reducing irresponsible business practices?
- Does managerial and overall corporate commitment to more positive changes at social, economic, and environmental levels match the risen expectations of business stakeholders and the overall society?
- How can corporate and democratic leadership be more effective in tackling and reducing CSiR?
- What role do policy makers play in making CSR practices viable?
- How well do policy makers support small- and large-scale businesses in reducing their economic, environmental, social and legal footprint?
- How helpful are the existing CSR frameworks for business?
- Are current widely accepted business governance models and systems aligned with CSR and the expected business ethics standards?
- Is it worth for the business to behave responsibly and ethically?
- What does CSR offer beyond brand awareness and reputation? Do investments in CSR grant a sustained competitive advantage?
- Do investments in CSR extend the business survival short and long-term?
- How can CSR better unite businesses with their stakeholders for the better good and a more sustainable business environment?

We welcome papers from various business disciplines, including business management, international business, strategy, strategic management, leadership, business ethics and sustainable development.

We encourage interdisciplinary research and especially international collaborations to see how different countries deal with these challenges and to share these cases as learning examples for theory advancements and better practices. We are interested in both conceptual papers and empirical research at different and multiple levels of analysis with various research methods and approaches.

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