Corporate Social Responsibility in the Dynamic Information Age of Inter-Systems Connectivity

Arvind Ashta, Burgundy School of Business (Groupe ESC Dijon-Bourgogne), France

ABSTRACT

The Information Age, with its new technologies, is accompanied by an accelerating shift in work relations, of which this article focuses on connectivity, interdependence and dynamism. Along with this change in relations, new ethical cultures and responsibilities are evolving at different levels: individual, corporate, governmental, NGO, and global. This article zooms in on theoretical developments related to Corporate Social Responsibility to see how they have evolved to adapt to the new mode of inter-dependent connectivity in a dynamic environment of changing relationships. The article proposes that, by and large, corporate-centric theories are giving way to person-centric theories. The limitations and contradictions of this evolutionary view and theories are also presented.

Keywords: connectivity; corporate social responsibility; economic relations; information age; inter-dependent systems

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN THE DYNAMIC INFORMATION AGE OF INTER-SYSTEMS CONNECTIVITY

With the wide diffusion of information on the Internet, consumerist and environmental movements have become more powerful (Wiest, 2006), in playing on the trust that the brand is supposed to provide (Clarke, 2003). These groups’ role has been to focus on fairness in corporate practices: punishing those who violated expected norms of fairness (Kahneman et al, 1986 a & b). In a world where brand image and intangible assets have become more important than tangible assets in many business lines, any harm to corporate reputation could considerably affect future cash flows (Frankental 2002). This has led to an increased awareness of corporate social responsibilities and an increase in this subject’s importance both to the firm and to the researcher.

This article seeks to take into account certain features of the Information Age: connectivity, dynamism, and inter-system dependence and explore their influence on the concept of
corporate social responsibility (CSR). Part I describes the Information Age and explains how different concepts of Social Responsibility relate to the new economic relations created by this Age. Where possible, the examples are limited to Information Technology (IT), even though in the Information Age all industries are affected by IT. Part II zooms in on the evolution of some of the different concepts and theories in the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) area before and after the era of connectivity and shows how theory has evolved to today where the debate has shifted to take into consideration the connectivity and inter-dependence questions.

INFORMATION AGE OF INTER-DEPENDENT CONNECTIVITY AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Interdependent Connectivity and Information Needs

The Information Age is characterised by new technologies, which have led to globalization (Friedman, 2006). Some salient new technologies include windows, Internet, workflow software, uploading, and mobile telephones. The combination of these technologies has resulted in an accelerated shift to new work relations such as outsourcing, off shoring, in-sourcing, supply chaining, and community development (see Figure 1).

The key words in these new work relations are connectivity and collaboration. Collaborative forms replace hierarchical modes and the balance of countervailing power is continuously changing. It may be IBM today, Intel

Figure 1. Information age: technological causes and business outcomes
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