
LANDMARKS IN THE EVOLUTION OF THE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF ORGANIZATIONS IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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Abstract

The social responsibility of organizations concept has become the subject of considerable researches, debates and commentaries especially in the second half of the last century. According to ethical principles organizations and individuals have the obligation to act in the benefit of society at large. Consequently, the social responsibility of a business is related to its duties and obligations directed towards the social welfare. The role of corporations in society and the issue of corporate social responsibility have been increasingly debated in the last century.

Based on a literature review our paper seeks to describe and summarize some of the main contributions to the development of the social responsibility of organizations. The aims of our paper are to explore the evolution of the social responsibility of organization concept in the last century and to emphasize its various approaches, mostly in the business field. This historical trace identifies both similarities and differences related to social responsibility themes.

Keywords: social responsibility, corporate social responsibility, corporations, organizations, stakeholders

1. Introduction

Since the beginning of the twentieth century scholars and researchers from different fields of study (e.g. business, sociology, philosophy, theology, law, economics etc.) have become interested in the social responsibility of organizations concept. The concept has become the subject of considerable researches, debates and commentaries especially in the second half of the last century.

The roots of social responsibility emerged earlier in the history of civilization. In essence, the genesis and evolution of social responsibility are linked to the evolution of human society. Any responsibility an individual/organization has towards the society as a whole is called social responsibility. According to ethical principles organizations and individuals have the obligation to act in the benefit of society at large. Consequently, the social responsibility of a business is related to its duties and obligations directed towards the social welfare. The role of corporations in society and the issue of corporate social responsibility (CSR) have been increasingly debated in the last century. Scholars all over the world have laid the stress on the fact there is an ethical responsibility of firms to drive their progress in the direction favorable for global society (Sady and Guja, 2010). Either passive, by avoiding engaging in harmful or destructive actions, or active, by achieving environmental and social goals or promoting an active citizenship, more and more companies have understood the need to act in a responsible manner.

In spite of the fact there is little agreement about the definition of CSR the evolution of the CSR concept suggests a multidimensional construct worthy of a multidisciplinary approach. As no universally acceptable definition of CSR exists a lack of consistency in this area has emerged (Fifka,

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2009). This could be partially explained by the existence of a relatively long history of the concept. That is why it is necessary to look at the emergence and development of the concept over the course of time, especially in the twentieth century. Over the last century the concept of CSR has continued to grow in importance (Carroll and Shabana, 2010).

Based on a literature review our paper seeks to describe and summarize some of the main contributions to the development of the social responsibility of organizations. The aims of our paper are to explore the evolution of the social responsibility of organization concept in the last century and to emphasize its various approaches, mostly in the business field. This historical trace identifies both similarities and differences related to social responsibility themes.

2. A retrospective of the evolution of the social responsibility of organizations

Since the ancient time it has been a permanent concern regarding the consequences of human activities, especially economic activities, upon society. During the history people have shown a continuous interest in ensuring durable resources for the economic activities. There has always been a tension between the use of resources and the population needs.

The Hindu Vedic and Sutra, the Buddhist Jatakas and the Islamic Zakat were among the first oldest texts that included ethical admonitions on usury or wealth tax. In the “Code of Hammurabi” the king of Babylon pleaded for the protection of slaves. The Roman senators voiced many protests about the insufficient contributions of businesses to fund the military campaigns of the Roman Empire.

In the Middle Ages the landlords were preoccupied to keep in balance the exploitation of their lands, livestock and forests. The French King Louis XIV took measures for the long term safekeeping of forests. In the eighteenth century and the nineteenth century workers were subjects to systematic exploitation (e.g. unhealthy working conditions, low wages etc.). In the second half of the nineteenth century a “corporate paternalism” emerged, especially in the United States of America (USA) and Great Britain. Some of the wealthiest capitalists supported philanthropic activities.

A. Carnegie earned a fortune in the American steel industry. One of the so-called “captains of industry” he was also a large-scale philanthropist by donating most of his money to the establishment of many institutions in the USA and Great Britain (e.g. universities, schools, libraries, foundations, charities etc.). On the eve of the twentieth century Carnegie published “Wealth”, an article that called both for the reconciliation of the rich and the poor, and for the spending of the great sums accumulated by the rich people for public purposes. By using his fortune to enrich the community within he acts the “man of Wealth” has to produce the most beneficial outcomes for it. According to his Dictum that illustrates once again his generous nature, the life of a wealthy industrialist should be divided in the following three periods:

- Getting all education he can.
- Making all the money he can.
- Giving the money for worthwhile causes.

On the other coast of the Atlantic Ocean the Quaker capitalism promoted the idea that wealth creation was not only for the benefit entrepreneurs but also for the benefit of employees, community and society at large. The Quaker businessmen felt that their companies existed for more reasons than just to make money and that they had a huge responsibility to give back something valuable to the community (Cadbury, 2010). Starting from its puritanical hard work ethic and sober austerity George and Richard Cadbury proved to be highly concerned with the quality of life of their employees. Therefore they decided to move the Cadbury factory from Birmingham to a country location and to build a factory town in a village, known as Bournville. A housing reformer interested in improving the living conditions of his employees, G. Cadbury envisaged Bournville as a community that served more than their employees. In a relative short period of time Bournville became the “factory in the garden” where Cadbury provided housing, gardens, football and cricket pitches, swimming pools,

shops, social clubs, schools, a concert hall and a lecture theatre. Each residence had a large garden with flower and fruit trees. As “doing good...is good for business”, G. Cadbury founded the Bourneville Village Trust, a charitable trust and registered landlord, in 1900. Its mission statement has promised to:

- Promote good quality social housing which protects the environment.
- Manage all the housing and estates to the highest standards to the residents.
- Encourage residents to share in decisions affecting their communities.

The community spirit remained strong through the years and guided Cadbury’s business philosophy.

On his turn, the American industrialist J. H. Patterson chose to spend a great deal of his fortune on their own employees by introducing the industrial welfare movement into factory life. The architects he engaged designed a “daylight factory” which ensured the comfort and the safety of his workers. For example, the air throughout the factory was changed every fifteen minutes and hundreds of shower baths were provided for the use of all employees. Moreover, Patterson enjoyed nature and launched the children’s garden movement in an attempt to provide to all communities such gardens. Under his direction an energetic campaign of education for better government started in order to make Dayton a model city. In this respect Patterson laid the foundation of the Department of Public Welfare of Dayton and wrote the Dayton Charter. By giving expression of a new conception regarding the duty of the state to all citizens, the charter stipulated that the Director of the Public Welfare Department had to (Garland, 1916, pp. 194-195):

- Manage all charitable, correctional and reformatory institutions and agencies belonging to the city.
- Enforce all laws, ordinances and regulations relative to the preservation and promotion of the public health, the prevention and restriction of disease.
- Provide for the study of and research into causes of poverty, delinquency, crime and disease and other social problems in the community.
- Promote the education and understanding of the community in those matters which affect the public welfare.

A man of rare vision, Patterson created the Dayton Foundation aiming to strengthen the community through philanthropy and leadership. From an initial 250,000 USD donation by the Patterson family in 1921 the foundation reached 371 million USD in assets in 2010, ranked the 38th among the wealthiest community foundations in the USA. Three primary goals have been identified for the Dayton Foundation in the last decade as follows:

- Providing community leadership/impact, by working with area not-for-profit organizations in direct partnership programs or services and identifying one major community initiative.
 - Increasing donor development and financial stewardship, by continuing to grow overall assets and increasing the number of funds and legacy commitments.
 - Developing and strengthening the organization to be more responsive to the needs of the Foundation’s donors, financial and estate planning advisors, and not-for-profit organizations.

In the early 1900s A. Heald advised the business leaders not to forget that they were trustees of the public interest. Later, the trusteeship concept of business responsibility, enunciated before by A. Carnegie, emerged in the practices of the rulers of General Electric, O. D. Young and G. Swope. They both sought to establish partnerships with government, community and labor.

One of the founders of the theory of workable competition, J. M. Clark shared his father’s view, J. B. Clark, of the importance of ethical issue. He advocated both the social control of industry for the general benefit and the control of trusts as follows: “...we can make very large corporations legitimate and safely avail ourselves of their productive power. The government can use insight, discover how nature is already working, be guided to the right experiment and try it promptly. It can

liberate the competitive forces that even now, trammled as they are, make our state endurable, and it can enable them to develop their full influence and make the condition comfortable and encouraging. It can do this while fostering and not repressing general prosperity, and while increasing and not lessening our chance of success in the fierce economic rivalries into which nations are entering.” (Clark and Clark, 1914, p. 14). Emphasizing the power of corporations over the wellbeing of individuals Clark called for the implementation of an economics of responsibility, embodied in the working business ethics. In this type of economics businesses have to recognize and admit their responsibilities to act in the light of social norms. The results of businesses actions (e.g. unsafe products, pollution etc.) are “things over which someone can exercise control and that means they are things for which someone is responsible” (Clark, 1916, p. 213). He also traced one of the lines of the social responsibility of corporations (CSR) when he stated that business responsibilities have to include the known results of business dealings.

W. B. Donham showed in the late 1920s that businesses did not yet recognize the magnitude of their responsibilities for the future of the civilization. In order to identify, estimate and measure the social performance of businesses, T. J. Kreps used for the first time the term “social audit” while introducing the subject of “Business and Social Welfare” to Stanford University in 1931 (Kreps, 1962). As a tool of measurement, the social audit “is a natural evolutionary step in the concern for operationalizing corporate social responsibility and, in its essence, represents a managerial effort to develop a calculus for gauging the firm’s socially oriented contributions” (Carroll and Beiler, 1975, p. 589). In his opinion the social audit is the real acid test of business and not the profit-and-loss statement. In this way Kreps developed a framework for measuring the social involvement of companies which reported on their social responsibility.

One year later, A. A. Berle and G. C. Means warned about the fact that huge American corporations had come to dominate major industries in the USA: “the economic power in the hands of the few persons who control a giant corporation is a tremendous force which can harm or benefit a multitude of individuals, affect whole districts, shift the currents of trade, bring ruin to one community and prosperity to another. The organizations which they control have passed far beyond the realm of private enterprise- they have become more nearly social institutions.” (Berle and Means, 1932, p. 46). In their opinion the few wealthy people who managed the big corporations had to repay society by contributing through various programs to its benefit. In the same year E. M. Dodd affirmed that corporations served a social service, as well an economic function (e.g. profit-making).

The C. Barnard’s “Functions of the Executive” of 1938 constituted “a substantial primer on leadership that resonates a profoundly humanistic ethic” (Aupperle and Dunphy, 2011, p. 156). He stated that the survival of an organization depends on its willingness to cooperate, its ability to communicate and its desire to ensure the integrity of its purpose. Starting from the structural concepts (e.g. individual, formal organization, informal organization etc.) and dynamic concepts (e.g. free will, cooperation, authority etc.) he considered the word “responsibility” as a quality that confers credibility, predictability, caution, and social responsibility as a function of the executive class. In his opinion the executive functions are different from other functions due to the fact that they impose the necessity of creating moral codes. Also, the durable organization depends on the quality of management which is based on morality. A high responsibility is necessary in any organization, either big or small, according to Barnard. His writings emphasize “competence, moral integrity, rational stewardship, and professionalism” (Mahoney, 2002, p. 162).

F. Capra, a film director at Columbia Pictures, launched the movie “Mr. Smith Goes to Washington” in 1939. Based on an explicit defense of America and its Christian values the film presents the story of a boy scout leader turned US senator who fights corruption. Capra embedded the individuals in a social matrix and demonstrated that once they became part of an artificial society they are no longer unique and irreplaceable. Fueling the theme of human alienation Capra called for the reinstallation of the individual at the center of the social reality and insisted on the fact that the social responsibility of the individual has not to be neglected or forgotten. He insisted on the idea that

each human being must take care of the people around him. In his concern about individual he proved his adoration for the Christian social ethics by taking up the theme of goodness and simplicity in a deeply selfish society.

In the 1940s P. F. Drucker, the “father of modern management”, argued that every company has both economic and social purposes. In his landmark study “The Concept of the Corporation” he emphasized that any corporation should be a social institution and a community for all employees: “...the essence of the corporation is social, that is human, organization” (Drucker, 1946, p. 31).

The famous Harvard Business Review published in 1949 two distinct articles written by B. Dempsey and D. K. David. Dempsey asserted that there are four concepts of justice at the foundation of the responsibilities of businessmen:

- Exchange justice.
- Distributive justice.
- General justice.
- Social/contributive justice.

The social/contributive justice refers to the obligation of businessmen to contribute to the wellbeing of individuals and society. David also stated that one of the priorities of businesses is to be constructive namely to operate in ways that respect the communities.

Since the end of the Second World War scholars and researchers have provided a huge number of theories about CSR. Therefore the theoretical literature on CSR can be divided in different phases (Table 1).

Table 1- Phases in the evolution of the theoretical literature on CSR

| No. | Authors | Phases |
|-----|--|--|
| 1. | P. Katsoulakos, M. Koutsodimou, A. Matraga, L. Williams (2004) | a) CSR initiation phase (1960-1990) b) CSR momentum building phase (1990-2000) c) Mainstreaming initiation phase (2000 onwards) |
| 2. | M.-C. Loison, A. Pezet, C. Berrier (2009) | I. Corporate Social Responsibility (1950s-1960s) II. Corporate Social Responsiveness (1970s-1980s) III. Corporate Social Rectitude (1980s) IV. Corporate Social Performance (1990s) V. Corporate Citizenship (2000s) |

In the 1950s F. W. Abrams launched the idea that the managers of corporations should voluntarily assume public responsibilities by acting as trustees of the public interest. Besides profits, companies had to take into consideration their employees, customers and the public at large. The modern era of social responsibility started when H. R. Bowen, the “father of CSR”, published his book entitled “Social Responsibilities of the Businessman” in 1953. He gave the first definition of the social responsibility in business: “it refers to the obligations of businessmen to pursue those policies, to make those decisions, or to follow those lines of action which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society” (Bowen, 1953, p. 6). Thus, Bowen thought about CSR as a way of integrating the societal values beyond the interests of shareholders. However, T. Levitt warned the business world about the dangers of the social responsibility. In his view social concerns were not the responsibility of business world, but of government.

The 1960s brought an effervescence of ideas related to the field of social responsibility. In 1960 K. Davis indicated that social responsibility implies businessmen’s decisions and actions taken for reasons beyond the direct economical or technical concerns of the firm. W. C. Frederick affirmed that social responsibility implies a public posture of the businessmen towards society’s economic and human resources. He asserted that an adequate theory of business responsibility had to meet several requirements as follows (Frederick, 1960, pp. 59-60):

• “First, its criterion of value should be drawn from our increasing awareness of the requirements of socially effective economic production and distribution, and particularly the necessities of economic growth and development on a broad social scale.

• ...The second requirement of an adequate theory of business responsibility is that it be based upon the new concepts of management and administration that are now emerging.

• ...Third, an adequate theory of business responsibility will recognize that the present business system is an outgrowth of history and past cultural traditions.

• ...The fourth requirement of a theory of business responsibility is that it recognizes that the behavior of individual businessmen is a function of the social role they play in business and society.

• ...Fifth, there should also be a recognition that socially responsible business behavior is not to be produced automatically but is rather to result from deliberate and conscious efforts of those institutional functionaries who have been given this task by society.”

One year later, R. Eells and C. Walton referred to corporate social responsibilities as ethical principles that ought to govern the relationships between corporations and society. On his turn G. Goyder considered social audit as a management tool in his book “The Responsible Company”. Based on the idea that with God’s grace a man can do anything he wants to Goyder’s business philosophy promoted efficiency and justice. He stated that the purpose of management is to create a balance among the responsibilities towards shareholders, employees, consumers and community.

Recognizing the primacy of economic interests for businesses J. W. McGuire provided a broader idea of their social responsibilities in the 1960s. He thought that corporations have not only economic and legal obligations, but also responsibilities to society. In 1970 M. Heald published a comprehensive history of the social responsibilities of business in which he analyzed the business policies and practices related to social responsibility. He focused on the ways businessmen experienced social responsibility. On his turn M. Friedman affirmed that the social responsibility of business is mainly to increase its profit. Along the same lines with A. Smith who promoted the pursuit of self-interest in a free market system, Friedman considered that enhancing profitability and shareholder value are the true responsibilities of business. One year later, the Committee for Economic Development (CED) showed that businesses function by public consent and aims to serve the societal needs. The CED proposed a model for corporate responsibility according to its “three concentric circles” approach:

- The inner circle includes the efficient execution of the economic function.
- The intermediate circle encompasses a responsibility to exercise this economic function.
- The outer circle outlines the emerging and still amorphous responsibilities.

Also H. L. Johnson noticed that social responsibility was important since companies necessitated to achieve a balance among various interests (e.g. employees, shareholders etc.) in order to accomplish their multiple goals. S. P. Sethi launched the corporate social performance model, a major advancement in the CSR theory, which articulated the following evolutionary stages (Sethi, 1975):

- Social obligation.
- Social responsibility.
- Social responsiveness.

In the late 1970s W. C. Frederick made the distinction between CSR1 (corporate social responsibility) and CSR2 (corporate social responsiveness) concepts. The former has ethical or moral threads and the latter is concerned only with the managerial processes. On the other hand, A. B. Carroll developed the “three dimensional conceptual model” of corporate performance. The social responsibilities can be divided into four main categories (Table 2), neither cumulative nor additive (Carroll, 1979).

Table 2- The four social responsibility categories according to A. Carroll

| No. | Category | Characterization |
|-----|---|---|
| 1. | Economic responsibilities | The business institution is the basic economic unit in our society. It has a responsibility to produce goods and services that society wants and to sell them at a profit. |
| 2. | Legal responsibilities | Society laid down the laws and regulations under businesses are expected to operate. Society expects companies to fulfill their economic mission within the framework of legal requirements. |
| 3. | Ethical responsibilities | There are additional behaviors and activities that are not necessarily codified into law but nevertheless are expected of business by citizens. In sum, society has expectations of business over and above legal requirements. |
| 4. | Discretionary/volitional responsibilities | There are responsibilities left to individual choice and judgment. They are at business's discretion; however, societal expectations do exist for businesses to assume social roles over and above described. |

In the 1980s K. E. Goodpaster and J. B. Mathews Jr. stated that a corporation can and should have a conscience. Later, R. E. Freeman introduced the stakeholder theory starting from the problem of value creation and trade. He considered that corporate management has a fiduciary responsibility to stakeholders, which are groups and individuals who have a stake in the success/failure of a company. S. L. Wartick and P. L. Cochran broadened the CSR concept to corporate social performance (CSP), based on principles, processes and policies. In their opinion the CSP represents "the underlying interaction among the principles of social responsibility, the process of social responsiveness and the policies developed to address social issues" (Wartick and Cochran, 1985, p. 758).

In the 1990s the term corporate citizenship gained visibility. Corporate citizenship (CC) designates the initiatives undertaken by companies to act responsibly in society and represents a discretionary activity, a choice for businesses to put something back into the community within they function. Also, the CC is a fruitful business practice both in terms of internal and external marketing (Maignan, Ferrell and Hult, 1999).

D. Wood provided an explanation of the socially responsible behavior of industries and firms. She also gave an explanation of how socially responsible objectives might be formulated and achieved. In her view the CSP is "a business organization's configuration of principles of social responsibility, processes of social responsiveness, and policies, programs, and observable outcomes as they relate to the firm's societal relationship" (Wood, 1991, p. 693). Close to the stakeholder theory, M. B. E. Clarkson defined CSP as the ability to manage and satisfy the different corporate stakeholders (Clarkson, 1995). On their turn, T. Donaldson and L. Preston expanded the stakeholder theory by emphasizing the moral and ethical dimension of CSR, as well as the business case for involving in such activities.

S. L. Hart tried to explain the competitive advantages starting from the environmentally responsible firms and by adapting the resource based view of the firm. J. Elkington launched the "triple bottom line" as an attempt to introduce an accounting paradigm to the social and environmental issues. Besides the responsibility of the company to generate economic welfare there are also the responsibilities to care for the society and the environment (Elkington, 1998).

At the end of the twentieth century researchers sought to demonstrate that the 21st century most successful global businesses will draw profit from their environmental and social responsibilities. They also called to learn to deal responsibly with all types of waste. This is why "a society that wastes its resources wastes its people and vice versa" (Hawken, Lovins and Lovins, 1999, p. 55).

3. Conclusions

The understanding of the historical evolution of the social responsibility of organizations is based on the view of what role they play or should play in society, especially businesses. Various definitions of social responsibility have appeared both from theoreticians and practitioners all over the world, often independently. A socially responsible organization has the duty to satisfy the needs of its stakeholders. On their turn, companies have social obligations in addition to their economic purposes. There is no social responsibility for businesses if their philosophy is separated from ethical principles. It means that they have a social responsibility towards the society within they perform.

A multifaceted concept, CSR has encouraged companies throughout the world to look at their social responsibilities as well as their usual responsibilities (e.g. economic). The dynamism of the CSR concept during the last century echoed its multidimensional nature. This means that there is an urgent need for coordinated efforts towards the study of the history of CSR based on a multidisciplinary research.

Our paper suggests that it may be useful to identify the landmarks in the evolution of the social responsibility of organizations in the last century in order to better understand this concept. It is our hope that this paper could serve as a starting point for further researches.

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