

CR³ Conference: The Power of Responsibility

Stream 7

Great expectations: Stakeholder Engagement for Global Responsibility

Convenors:

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The past decades have seen significant changes both in the role of business in society and in the way academics address these phenomena. Throughout the world companies have been subjected to increased scrutiny as a result of the negative social, economic, and environmental impacts of their products and processes. Ever more diverse actors in society—including the media, public policymakers at different levels of society, international non-governmental associations, consumers, and local citizens—have been seeking ways not only to hold companies to account for their performance after the fact, but to influence the thinking and decision-making in order to bring a broader range of considerations into the process from the outset. An additional factor influencing the expectations on business is that societies are experiencing ever larger and more complex problems—climate change, poverty and unemployment, urban decay, or epidemic diseases—that appear intractable because they often have multiple root causes and they cross sectoral or national boundaries. Dealing with them effectively requires drawing together a range of resources and competences from multiple actors. There is growing recognition that the distribution of roles and responsibilities between actors in society must change because the state alone can no longer be relied on to meet the needs of society. In many cases the public sector has neither sufficient funds nor expertise to deal with the complex issues threatening the economic, social, and environmental health of the country. As a result, the business community is increasingly being expected to step in to help, blurring the lines that have traditionally been drawn between the public and the private sectors.

Management scholars started addressing the relationship of business and society under the label of “corporate social responsibility” and introduced the concept of “stakeholders” to refer to different actors interested in and capable of influencing the performance of the corporation. Given the focus on “corporate social responsibility”, which puts the spotlight on the company as the central actor responding to the demands for behaving in a responsible, accountable manner, it is logical that the discussion was conducted under the label of “stakeholder management.” The idea at the outset was to stimulate managers to recognize different stakeholders, identify their interests and their potential impact on the organization so as to “manage” them. Recent years have seen a shift in the conceptualization about the relations with stakeholders for several reasons. Stakeholders have grown in numbers and strength, becoming skilled at using the power of web-based communication for sharing knowledge and exerting pressure on companies. International NGOs and consumers interested in the entire supply chain, for example, do not lend themselves easily to being “managed” by companies. As indicated above, the complexity of the problems facing societies has led to the creation of new constellations of actors to address them, blurring the distinction between public and private sector activities and responsibilities. As a result there

is a move away from the traditional company-centric view of corporate social responsibility and stakeholder management. Some researchers suggest updating the concept of “corporate social responsibility” to the broader term “global responsibility” in order to do justice to the facts that (a) all kinds of organizations must act responsibly, (b) the dimensions are not just “social” but at least also environmental and economic, and (c) the scope is international. Parallel to this reconceptualization of the field is the shift away from “stakeholder management” to “stakeholder engagement”. The change in terminology is significant, reflecting a change in the way the relationship is conceived. By referring to “stakeholder engagement” researchers are taking note of (and often recommending) a multilateral and proactive form of interaction between actors in the field of business and society. The shift to “stakeholder engagement” also entails the recognition that the agenda is in flux. New topics emerge and become important over time—and at the same time. The ability to tune in to what matters to current and future stakeholders early enough is important for members of organizations—and therefore for the scholars who study them.

The broad content area of submissions to this stream may cover (but is not limited to) one or more of the following:

Theoretical elaborations and critical assessments of works on stakeholder engagement for global responsibility

- What are the theoretical and practical implications of the move from stakeholder management to stakeholder engagement?
- How to measure the degree of stakeholder engagement?
- How to increase stakeholders’ engagement for global responsibility?

Empirical studies providing insights into phenomena related to stakeholder engagement for global responsibility

- What are the outcomes of partnerships between companies and NGOs?
- What is the impact of transnational company agreements on CSR concluded between companies and workers’ representatives?
- What can be the role of arts in stimulating new ideas and practices in the area of global responsibility?