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How Web 2.0 will save CSR

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Introduction

Corporate social responsibility (CSR), encompassing business ethics as well, was at first an act of patronage, with many corporations paying lip service to the notion. But today it has become a tool for risk prevention cleverly wrapped in a message, sometimes green or humanist and often full of good feelings. However, this imperative of society must now become an incentive to invent new models of communications among stakeholders. Indeed, one can expect that CSR will become the new paradigm of sustainable business management tomorrow. Innovative companies have already understood this; those who confuse it with a simple marketing tool should anticipate difficult times.

This fundamental enterprise change from business-as-usual in developed countries is accelerated by the fact that now all members of society – and not only regulators – call upon businesses to demonstrate ‘best practices’ in setting social, environmental and financial standards. This movement is no longer limited to developed countries but is being relayed to emerging economies where recent growth must not come at the expense of sustainable living conditions.

Thus, the precepts of CSR and sustainable development cannot be reduced to one more fight against global warming or the quest for clean energy future. Development may be said to be a story of overall confidence: in people, primarily, and in their ability to overcome their individual resistance to change, and in consumers since they are at the forefront of demand for the supply of goods and services,
public and private. But it will also be a story of an economy featuring both low carbon/low environmental impact and creative solidarity in companies that need to change their business model at the margin, taking into account the costs imposed by climate change or the new global balance of competition.

Current responses, both individual and collective, vary. However, the magnitude of the change to be accomplished at the global level is such that there is no doubt that the coming decades will be the years for an operational capability for CSR and sustainable development. This implementation is now possible with the tools of Web 2.0.

Note: This chapter is part of a more complete explorative study (Mauléon and Gioani, 2010) dealing with CSR's future and its effectiveness in organisations and with members of civil society through the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs).

**CSR currently at the centre of the enterprise’s survival**

Social responsibility was a term first coined by Bowen (1953) to describe the individual concerns of certain leaders who questioned the role of ethics and moral values in business. This management concept no longer needs to show its mettle. Nevertheless, it has now become such a ‘trendy’ phenomenon that many people still wonder if it’s just a passing fad. Many managers also privately wonder this, and just practice a minimum compliance with the law when they have to account for the activity of their enterprise.

The aim of this chapter is not to recount the discovery of the current importance of CSR’s implementation. Many authors have described this phenomenon, including the authors of this study, yet, it is only relatively new in French literature (Lépineux et al., 2010). To give a brief insight, the research carried out in France on CSR vacillates between two predominant stances as follows.

For some, social responsibility must be linked to the managers’ awareness of the necessity of integrating extra-economic facts into their management decisions (Igalens and Joras, 2005). Corporate social responsibility is assimilated into one of the nuances of business ethics and would thus be its collective expression.

For others, social responsibility is an emanation of corporate governance. One needs to make the stakeholders’ different points of