CALL FOR PAPERS

Special issue on
“Corporate social responsibility (CSR) in controversial industry sectors”

The deadline for submission is December 1, 2011.

Guest editors:
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Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has gained unprecedented prominence in academic and business spheres alike (Kotler and Lee, 2005; McWilliams, Siegel, and Wright, 2006); more than ever before, it is necessary for organizations to define their roles in society and apply social, environmental, ethical, and responsible standards to their businesses (Lichtenstein, Drumwright, and Braig, 2004; Lindgreen, Swaen, and Johnston, 2009). Beyond the moral arguments and value-based debates that characterize the complex landscapes of CSR-related concepts and ideas (Garriga and Melé, 2004), corporate commitment to socially responsible management practices is associated with a conviction that the failure to meet basic social rules or expectations pertaining to the way organizations should behave can result in perceptions of those organizations as illegitimate (Campbell, 2007; Sethi, 1975). Increased engagement in CSR-related policies and initiatives, and the associated communicative efforts, therefore provide a way for organizations to circumvent situations and practices that might be perceived as unethical or unsustainable and “alienate the organization from the rest of society, resulting in reduced reputation, increased costs, and decreasing shareholder value through erosion of its license to operate” (Hill, 2001: 32).

In such a context, this call for papers raises the question: How is it possible for organizations in “controversial industry sectors,” which often are marked by social taboos, moral debates, and political pressures, to maintain reasonable socially responsible standards? For industry sectors typically characterized as “sinful” (e.g., tobacco, gambling, weapons, alcohol, adult entertainment), as well as for those that inherently entail persistent or emerging environmental, social, or ethical issues (e.g., nuclear, oil, cement, biotech), this special issue aims to provide some answers. How can these organizations employ CSR-related policies and practices to meet their public legitimacy requirements?
In their seminal work in this area, Wilson and West (1981: 92) described controversial industry sectors as related to “products, services or concepts that for reasons of delicacy, decency, morality, or even fear to elicit reactions of distaste, disgust, offence or outrage when mentioned or when openly presented.” Although attitudes to such industry sectors vary by culture (Waller, Fam, and Erdogan, 2005), they and their products or services often come under close scrutiny by those who view them as morally corrupt (de Colle and York, 2008), unethical (Byrne, 2010), offensive (Fam and Waller, 2003), or exemplary of aberrant behavior (Budden and Griffin, 1996)—perhaps regardless of the actual or latent harm to society, the environment, or the individual (Pratten, 2007; Demont, Wesseler, and Tollens, 2004; Kindt, 2006). Many such industry sectors affect more vulnerable groups in society and local communities disproportionately (Bristow, 2007; Cook et al., 2003; Nikiforuk, 2008), yet remain legal, provide tax revenues for governments, and meet consumer demands.

Thus, this call for papers considers the relationship between such controversial industry sectors and CSR. Do organizations in these industries use CSR to present themselves in a positive manner—doing well by doing good—and deflect negative perceptions and associations? Should such a relationship be approached as an appropriate association, or is it rather a cynical attempt to legitimize questionable offerings and fool stakeholders?

Despite some recent research on the topic (e.g., Banerjee and Bonnefous, 2010; Byrne, 2007; Frynas, 2005; Palazzo and Richter, 2005; Runde-Thiele, Ball, and Gillespie, 2008; Yoon, Gürhan-Canli, and Schwarz, 2006), a general feeling among academics and practitioners suggests we have only just begun to understand how organizations in controversial industry sectors gain or sneak legitimacy through their CSR policies and initiatives. Different legitimacy-gaining approaches have been investigated, though research gaps remain, and new fields need to be explored. This special issue hopes to address these lacunae. The selected articles will provide solid theoretical foundations—with or without empirical investigation—for gaining legitimacy in controversial industries and consider the complex relationships between controversial industries and CSR activities. In particular, we hope this special issue will consider the following topics (although articles can consider other relevant topics as well):

- Can an organization be socially responsible if it produces products harmful to society? The environment? Individuals?
- What is the impact of CSR activities on an organization’s reputation and public legitimacy? How do various stakeholder groups react to CSR activities developed by organizations in controversial industry sectors?
- In which circumstances can CSR investments hurt or improve the reputation and legitimacy of organizations operating in such sectors? What are the processes that underlie these contingency effects?
- How can CSR activities promote self-regulation and diminish government intervention in and regulatory actions related to debatable practices? How does this process affect the public good?
- How do CSR activities in controversial industries invite cynical evaluations of the wider CSR movement? How do they affect credibility?
- How do organizations address and respond emerging social issues? And how do such social issues impact on organizations’ long-held business practices?
- Is lobbying employed by organizations in controversial industry sectors (how and to which extent)? If so, do organizations then avoid having to deal with social taboos, moral debates, and political pressures?
What do organizations do when they have operations in several countries that differ from one another in terms of what is considered as social taboos, moral debates, and political pressures?

Process for submitting papers

Papers submitted must not have been published, accepted for publication, or presently under consideration for publication elsewhere. Submissions should be approximately 6-8,000 words in length. Copies should be submitted via e-mail as a Word document (.doc’ attachment; one file including all figures and tables) to Adam_Lindgreen@hotmail.com and lindgreena@cardiff.ac.uk.

Papers should employ standard English. To be eligible for review, manuscripts must follow the journal’s guidelines and provide full contact information for the authors. For additional guidelines, see the “Notes for Contributors” in Journal of Business Ethics or at the homepage at http://www.springer.com/social+sciences/applied+ethics/journal/10551. Authors should not identify themselves in the body of the paper. The paper’s front page should have the authors’ names, affiliations, and contact information (e-mail addresses, telephone numbers, and physical addresses).

For submission and any questions please contact the guest editors:

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References


