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Describing CSR has five components

From Dr Hans W. Decker.

Sir, I teach a seminar on strategic CSR at Columbia University/SIPA, struggling with the topic of corporate social responsibility. I agree with Gillian Tett: this is not an either/or proposition of making money or caring about the ills of the world (“When making shampoo becomes a service to society”, February 4).

We, in class, have given up defining CSR; we are just describing relevant aspects. In the process we have identified five components that are common to usual discussions of CSR:

First, law and regulations: corporations have to comply.

Second, pre-law and regulation: in the messy process towards law and regulations, ie politics, what is the role of corporations? There are strong arguments that the state should protect the common good, not companies.

Third, strategic CSR: this is, to my mind, the core of all CSR – the attempt to align the business proposition (making money) with pursuing societal concerns (however described). We still have a hard time identifying the relevant societal concerns and, moreover, we don’t know how to measure the societal part.

Four, non-strategic CSR: this encompasses societal work that is not yet at the level of alignment as just mentioned.

Five, philanthropy: in the US, that’s how CSR all started.

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