Editorial 28.3: Human social responsibility

This issue of *CCIJ* brings a set of articles focussing on the publics' environmental attitudes and behaviour as well as articles studying employee sensemaking and work relationships and behaviour along with articles looking at media coverage of Justice, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI) issues and equality on corporate boards. As with some previous editorials (e.g. on listening; Topić, 2022), I read articles and found a common message or a question that derives from articles even though this is not a special issue. What came to my mind when reading this issue's articles is asking to what extent are we socially responsible. By this, I mean organisations but also humans. Do we care enough about the planet or one another? How can communication help in making all of us more socially responsible? What is the role of organisations and excellent corporate communications in creating a more socially responsible world?

Social responsibility has been discussed in many contexts, but the most prominent and most known one is the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR), which has been an issue on the academic and *CCIJ's* agenda for decades. The concept itself came to prominence during the 1970s and 1980s protests and discontent and then CSR got operationalised and put in place by Ronald Reagan in the USA and Margaret Thatcher in the UK (Pillay, 2015) when these two neoliberal politicians asked businesses to support society by, for example in the UK, helping address youth unemployment (Moon, 2004, 2005). The media then embraced the concept of CSR and started to push companies to give more to societies, which ultimately endorsed the politics of economic growth that many authors blame for environmental destruction (Topić, 2021), and some argued that economic growth is fuelling environmental destruction and threatening the survival of the planet. The latter has been a subject of debate since the famous report, *The Limits of Growth* by Meadows *et al.* (1972) who argued that humankind has failed in solving problems of environmental degradation. In a preface to this report, Watts (1972) argued that humankind has failed to resolve issues such as "the complex of problems troubling men of all nations: poverty in the midst of plenty; degradation of the environment; loss of faith in institutions; uncontrolled urban spread; insecurity of employment; alienation of youth; rejection of traditional values; and inflation and other monetary and economic disruptions" (p. 10). The report then argues that humankind has failed in solving all these issues because they are analysed in a way that is not connected and that people are too focused on their personal problems and therefore do not participate in environmental affairs as much as they could or would if they were not concerned with survival and providing for themselves (Meadows *et al.*, 1972). In an update published in 2004, *Limits of Growth – A 30 years update* (Meadows *et al.*, 2004), authors argued that their predictions from 1972, originally seen as an outrage, have proven right and that the Earth is reaching its limits. Data show climate change is real, and that environmental destruction is jeopardising humankind because of consumption, particularly in the West (Sandberg and Sandberg, 2010; Griffin, 2020; Salleh, 1994, 2000), and some authors argued that CSR is part of the wheel of neoliberalism perpetuating the status quo and environmental destruction (Topić, 2021).

CSR and social responsibility generally remain connected to the environmental debate, but an argument could be made that social responsibility is actually about equality because we do not treat one another equally, and we certainly do not act as caretakers of the planet with relentless exploitation. Whilst the CSR concept has done some good and it continues to be pervasive among organisations that are trying to demonstrate what they are doing for

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society, this is largely led by consumer pressure and the media support for the concept, which has not changed (Topić, 2021), thus the concept is rightfully studied in the academic community and has a significant place in the *CCIJ* too. CSR usually has several components such as environmental responsibility (organisations should be as environmentally friendly as possible), ethical responsibility (organisations should operate in a fair and ethical manner), philanthropic responsibility (organisations should try to make the world and society a better place) and economic responsibility (financial decisions of organisations should be aligned to commitments expressed in other three areas of responsibility) (Stobierski, 2021). But there is also a concept of social responsibility that has not been pertinent to corporations only; the concept has been debated in media studies since the famous Hutchins Commission released a report on social responsibility of the media, *A Free and Responsible Press,* in 1947 and argued that the press has rights but also responsibilities (Bivins, 2004; Culver, 2017), and this approach later became a foundation for social responsibility of the media approach where proponents argued historically that media cannot be objective and simply provide information but need to also look after the wellbeing of society, which also means opening a public debate because if the information is not properly debated, this leads to manipulation and misleading the public (Ward, 2008; Lasch, 1990). This view is also linked with criticism of the market position of the media because it does not support democracy if the media are serving their own commercial interests (Benson, 2008). In other words, since media have a role in informing the public and forming public attitudes, which is a very powerful role, some authors argued that it is incompatible for the media to also have economic goals and work in the open market because it erodes media social responsibility and threatens democratic standards (Ingenhoff and Koelling, 2012).

More recently, apart from corporate and media responsibility, the human social responsibility (HSR) concept found its place in the debate on how to create a better world. The concept of HSR has been formally around since the Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities proposed by the InterAction Council [1] on the 1st of September 1997 as a result of identifying new issues such as "climate change, terrorism, resource shortages, a digital divide and Internet violence" (Singh, 2020, p. 1). The Declaration states that globalisation has been matched by global problems and solving problems and achieving equality "demands that rights and responsibilities be given equal importance to establish an ethical base so that all men and women can live peacefully together and fulfil their potential. A better social order both nationally and internationally cannot be achieved by laws, prescriptions and conventions alone, but needs a global ethic. Human aspirations for progress can only be realised by agreed values and standards applying to all people and institutions at all times" (A Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities, 1997, p. 1). The preamble states these basic foundations outlining also that humans have the right to leave in peace and without lawlessness and chaos, but this also requires acting justly and respecting each other by all cultures and societies, and with all humans having "a responsibility to foster a better social order" (A Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities, 1997, p. 2); the document then continues with identifying elements of human responsibility and thus outlines fundamental principles of humanity (defining rights such as being treated and treating others in a human way, promoting good and avoiding evil and treating others as one would want to be treated), and then continues with non-violence and respect for life section where articles regulate obvious issues such as a right to live and denouncing anyone the right to kill, torture, injure a human person or engaging in acts of genocide or terrorism or any form of abuse of any group of civilians during the war. But, this section, article 7, also identifies human responsibilities towards the environment by saying,

> Every person is infinitely precious and must be protected unconditionally. The animals and the natural environment also demand protection. All people have a responsibility to protect the air, water

and soil of the earth for the sake of present inhabitants and future generations (A Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities, 1997, p. 3).

The Declaration continues with regulating human relationships such as between men and women calling for mutual understanding, and it also outlines that the Declaration moves from just outlining rights to also outlining responsibilities by saying, for example, that "if we have a right to life, then we have the obligation to respect life" (A Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities, 1997, p. 8), etc. This Declaration clearly draws from the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights [2], which regulates the rights of humans but does not focus sufficiently on outlining responsibilities and that the right cannot be seen in an absolutist way without having a responsibility to respect the rights of others, as InterAction Declaration clearly outlines.

The InterAction's Declaration happened during the rise of CSR and the proliferation of academic research in this area but given the criticism of CSR as greenwashing and many companies indeed using it to greenwash their activities, as well as the rise of employee consciousness of wellbeing and the rising critique of neoliberalism, it comes as no surprise that a concept of HSR emerged, which some authors and commentators are arguing could replace CSR albeit this concept has not yet found popularity in academic research respective to CSR. Proponents of the HSR approach argue that CSR is ending and that this is a good thing because CSR has always been attached to corporations, whereas many businesses are smaller but still aim to be socially responsible. HSR is attributed to Rachel Hutchinson, the Vice President of Corporate Citizenship and Philanthropy at Blackbaud who argued that we need to shift from corporate to human in how organisations serve communities by calling on the focus on employees who are at the heart of the organisation and who can create, as a key part of the organisation, a voice in creating benefit for communities even if not at the board and formally making decisions (A Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities, 1997). In one interview she defined HSR in this way, "Human Social Responsibility (HSR) is the shift in focus from Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) to a more people and community centric effort. By shifting from a corporate focus to a human focus, barriers are broken down with regard to who is at the heart of an organization and who gets a seat at the decision-making table" (CSRWire Blogs, 2016, n.p.). In the same interview, she also argued that using the term CSR puts an emphasis on corporations rather than humans, which is also not inclusive because many people do not understand the terminology and do not know how to get involved; with most people being employed by SMEs, this obviously creates barriers and an issue. Therefore, Hutchinson argues that "good is for everyone" and "we need to stop thinking that only certain kinds of organizations are capable of being wired for good" because "Human Social Responsibility means that organizations of all sizes, as conveners of people, will take their lead from their employees and their individual human social contracts" (Blackbaud Engage Blog, 2016, n.p.). In other words, people and their individual characteristics, problems and daily concerns will be brought into organisations because humans bring life to any organisation and its vision and purpose, and this is particularly the case because people bring themselves to work (Blackbaud Engage Blog, 2016). Tennille (2020) commented on HSR in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and argued that perhaps HSR can become a standard for new responsible businesses in the COVID-19 era. In other words, Tennille (2020) argued that COVID-19 has put humans at the centre of every decision because all sectors, governance, non-profit and private were united in fostering the common good, in the case of the pandemic subjecting themselves to the loss of profit and social contact for the purpose of reducing the spread of the virus. Tennille (2020) thus argued that "regarding the private sector response to COVID-19, perhaps this is the catalyst that'll shift the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) to human social responsibility (HSR)" (n.p.). Hutchinson (Blackbaud Engage Blog, 2016, n.p.) also argued that organisations need to take cues from their people or

employees who should not be ignored because "their social good is your social good story", thus calling organisations to "1. Know what your people care about; 2. Put your people at the center of your giving; 3. Empower your people as agents of good" (Blackbaud Engage Blog, 2016), and this then also translates into taking cues from the community and thus the rules are similarly stating "1. Know what your community cares about; 2. Put your community at the center; 3. Partner on doing good" (Blackbaud Engage Blog, 2016). This is true, and as I have argued in a digital transformation editorial, as well as in an editorial on listening (Topić, 2022, 2023), organisations indeed consist of humans and are not self-contained organisms, thus it is true that humans in the organisations can make choices that will change the world and turn corporations into organisations that do better. This will ultimately benefit organisations in terms of employee retention and engagement as well as branding (as Hutchinson also argues), but this obviously has implications in a wider area of issues and could be extended to consumer affairs and arguing that each and every one of us has the power to change the world and influence how the world is run and organised with decisions we make as part of publics. In addition to that, each and every one of us has the power to decide which organisations we support and how we act respective of environmental or EDI (equality, diversity, inclusion) affairs, thus social responsibility to change the world rests on humans and their commitment to doing good. Whilst Hutchinson is right in saying that everyone can do good, including corporations, ultimately how we assess what is good is up to us and publics comes from different walks of life and have different levels of education and understanding of the world, different values and priorities, and these differences can be influenced by many things, including also how we communicate, how corporations communicate and how we receive information. In addition to that, and when it comes to the environment, understanding the publics is a role of corporate communications and public relations because effective communication can indeed contribute towards boosting social responsibility, organisational as well as human.

For example, message framing usually refers to the use of gain-framing or loss-framing rhetoric, with the ultimate aim to convey the same message to target audiences and whilst positive framing places an emphasis on profit or gain if a certain action is undertaken, negative framing places an emphasis on the loss that could happen if individuals do not behave in a certain way, thus individual behaviour is often influenced by messaging and whether messaging is framed as either gain or loss (Kahneman and Tversky, 1979; Grady *et al.*, 2011; Rothman and Salovey, 1997; Rothman *et al.*, 1993; Spence and Pidgeon, 2010; Hulme, 2008). This type of communication is linked to persuasion because framing is known to influence decision-making, particularly in the context of health decisions or environmental decisions. In this issue, Sung In Choi, Jingyu Zhang and Yan Jin studied message strategies enhancing the effectiveness of strategic environmental risk communication in different countries respective to the publics' risk perception, risk responsibility attribution and the publics' sustainable behavioural intention. The findings shed light on environmental risk framing, in the context of China and Korea, where this study was based, regarding the particulate matter of air pollution showing that "loss-framed risk messages seem to allow participants to be alerted that the PM issue is a severe risk, which is likely to drive higher sustainable behavioral intention". Equally, findings imply that "if an environmental issue is reported using gain framing, such a message is less likely to be effective in changing publics' risk perception and behavior toward preserving the environment". The authors also argue that to produce more effective communication strategies respective to environmental communication, it is "necessary to increase publics' awareness of the environmental risk itself". In this same issue, Jeyoung Oh and Eyun-Jung Ki write about extending norm activation theory to understand the publics' support for environmentally responsible organisations. In that, the authors researched the effects of the publics' awareness of environmental consequences on the perceived environmental responsibility of organisations

and organisational norms, which can have an impact on the publics' supportive behaviour towards environmentally responsible organisations. In addition to that, the authors examined the role of social media in environmental information. The findings of the study indicated that organisational norms that the publics assign to organisations have an impact on publics' behaviour and can elicit supportive behaviour for organisations because "awareness of environmental consequences positively influences individuals' ascription of responsibility to organizations". In addition to that, "informational use of social media has a significant influence on all of the elements of the norm activation theory (. . .) those who utilize social media to gain information regarding environmental issues are more likely to be aware of negative environmental consequences". Therefore, these two papers clearly show how the publics react to environmental affairs and what kind of messaging might be appropriate for reaching out, and just as this can be used for general organisational gain and creating CSR programmes, organisations can also use it for good and encouraging publics to be more socially responsible when it comes to the environment by implementing communication strategies that communicate organisational values and encourage people to do good. Socially responsible programmes should not just be about what corporations do but inviting others to join in and do good together and informing the publics' on what constitutes socially responsible behaviour.

However, whilst the concept of HSR is growing, that does not mean that the traditional CSR concept is dead and that corporations stopped using some well-established practices, such as corporate reporting, which requires research. Irene Pollach and Stefan Schaper for this issue researched social visibility and substance in corporate sustainability disclosures to understand why some firms offer more substance in their social disclosures than others. Corporate social disclosures are seen to reduce information asymmetry between a company and its stakeholders, but some have questioned the value of these reports emphasising greenwashing and disseminating only positive information (Schultz *et al.*, 2013; Einwiller and Carroll, 2020; Herold *et al.*, 2019). Authors of this paper looked at social disclosure through the prism of organisational legitimacy and argue, based on their findings, that "social visibility as a determinant of social disclosure substance can be operationalized as proximity to consumers, stock listing and media visibility, while headquarters turned out not to be relevant in this regard. Based on this conceptualization, the social visibility of firms is therefore an adequate explanation for some of the variation in social disclosure substance. Consumer proximity is a strong determinant for substance, which is logical for companies such as textile and mining explored in this paper because these industries have received coverage and attention regarding poor treatment of employees, the so-called sweatshops (textile) and environmental impact (mining). Authors also argue that "stock listed companies are often also subject to more media visibility and scrutiny from a broader range of stakeholders including also regulators, thus creating higher incentives for more substantive disclosures". This paper basically shows, even if this was not the focus of the paper, that the publics and their awareness of the problem can have an impact on organisational conduct, thus publics engaging in socially responsible behaviour can impact organisational behaviour and contribute towards a more socially responsible world. This behaviour does not benefit just the planet and humanity but organisations themselves too as Elena Fedorova, Igor Demin and Elena Silina show in their paper in this issue where they presented results of the analysis of corporate philanthropy expenditures and disclosures of Russian companies and how they affect investment attractiveness. Authors argued that better corporate philanthropy disclosure in annual reports improves a company's investment attractiveness because it reduces information asymmetry and maintains effective communication about the company's performance and its long-term strategy. The study contributed to the knowledge of emerging markets and how disclosures affect company performance, which has so far only been researched in the Western context where the trend,

as studies including in this issue show, has also moved towards studying corporate social advocacy (CSA) and not just CSR with CSA also having an impact on company performance.

CSA is a situation where companies take a stance on a social and/or political issue, often a controversial one (Dodd and Supa, 2014) and because many companies go beyond the usual CSR initiatives, researchers started to study CSA as a distinctive concept separated from CSR. The main difference is that in CSA activities, companies take a public stance supporting one side of the controversial issue, whereas CSR is usually a social initiative meant to support society or the community as a whole (Rim *et al.*, 2020). In this issue, Joon Kyoung Kim, Holly Overton, Khalid Alharbi, Jackson Carter and Nandini Bhalla researched individual-level psychological determinants of individuals' word-of-mouth (WOM) intentions to support CSA initiative, using also the theory of planned behaviour (TPB). Results showed that "individuals' WOM behavior as a way to support companies taking a stance on a social-political issue is shaped by their attitude toward the behavior, social support for the behavior, and perceived efficacy to perform the behavior. The results suggest that individuals' psychological factors play an important role in determining their intention to talk positively about companies engaging in CSA". Therefore, this paper again shows the importance of understanding the publics and their behavioural intentions, which can contribute towards pushing organisations to do good and which, in turn, can help with creating a more socially responsible world as well as communicate more effectively.

As already mentioned earlier in this editorial, HSR is focused on giving employees a voice and empowering them to act on behalf of the organisation and Katharine E. Miller for this issue researched employee sensemaking of CSR, using a qualitative method of 42 interviews. Based on her findings, the author argues that employees construct the meaning of CSR via a cyclical relationship between texts and conversations and see themselves as primary, critical stakeholders in driving and executing CSR or bringing this policy into being. In addition to that, employees see CSR as "communicatively (re) constructed" and as an "organizing response to social issues and stakeholder expectations creating internal social movements". Thus, employees see CSR, not as a "thing" but "rather a phenomenon brought about by the issue of what constitutes social responsibility of any business" (Dahlsrud, 2008). This paper goes in line with the HSR concept that says employees should be empowered and are indeed the ones that can push their values forward and support organisations in doing good, which contributes to societal and organisational wellbeing; however, the paper then also opens a question of recruitment policies and whose individual values can be pushed forward as organisational values. In addition to that, the focus on employees is indeed relevant, particularly in the context of the Great Resignation and many workers quitting their jobs and changing employers (World Economic Forum, 2022), and Hassan Imam, Anu Sahi and Mobina Farasat for this issue used a social exchange perspective to explore supervisor support and employee engagement. In that, authors argue that social support is a critical factor at work explaining how employees deal with challenging job demands; however, supervisory support provides situational resources such as training and career development to employees and a social exchange perspective on performance leads them to attain their organisational goals. In addition, the authors argue that supervisory support is crucial to employee engagement because it adds to employees' psychological, emotional and cognitive resources, which motivate them to perform well in their tasks. Authors also suggest that supervisory support may enhance the emotional and relational bond with employees, fulfil employees' socio-emotional needs and result in employees' positive behaviour. Therefore, focussing on employees and supporting them is crucial for organisational performance, but if we are to follow the HSR model of empowering employees and listening to them, this can indeed result in more positive organisational outcomes as well as more HSR in general.

Media coverage has an impact on people's attitudes and public opinion (Levin *et al.*, 1998; Vogler and Eisenegger, 2021), and thus coverage of issues such as JEDI is important in the

context of media social responsibility because it can have an impact on behaviours, attitudes and perceptions of the public (Austin, 2010; Bardhan, 2016; Maier and Ravazzani, 2019; Pasztor, 2019; Suh and Lee, 2016). David Lynn Painter and Brittani Sahm for this issue studied framing esports' JEDI issues and how media covered these issues focussing on media in Asia, Europe and North America, the three continents where most esports fans are concentrated, with the aim to analyse esports' race, gender, age and social class issues linked to media social responsibility in covering these issues. Authors compared tones, frames and frequencies of race, gender, age and social class issues in esports' JEDI coverage in a period between 2014 and 2021. The findings of the study indicated that "there were significant differences in the coverage among the continents. These results suggest cultural values may influence media organizations' reporting on organizational JEDI issues. Across the continents, however, most of esports' JEDI coverage was positive or neutral, presenting esports as a growing business rather than an industry with persistent disparities in race, gender, age and social class. For example, gender and age may were relatively frequently mentioned in the coverage, but race and social class were seldom noted. Moreover, none of these JEDI issues were the most prominent topic in 80% of any continent's coverage". Since esports industry had many issues with scandals related to JEDI, authors argue that neutral tones in coverage and presenting the esports industry only objectively are problematic because they legitimise voices opposed to JEDI; this is along with positive coverage that writes about the industry's growth. The authors thus argue that media are showing irresponsibility because they lag behind other organisations in speaking about societal issues, thus failing to serve society. Nevertheless, authors argue that "in particular, media organizations' abilities to communicate about JEDI issues in ways that are socially responsible are predicated on their independence from commercial interests. However, the environment is more competitive and media organizations depend on advertising revenue, making them beholden to private interests today more than ever. Moreover, since advertising revenue fluctuates based on popularity, journalists and media organizations may hesitate to report on JEDI issues because they fear alienating their audiences. Indeed, the risks of offending viewers or advertisers through investigative stories highlighting the industry's JEDI issues outweigh the rewards of socially responsible journalism when the cancellation of advertising contracts or the loss of readership is an existential threat". This paper thus opens the question of the role of the media in fostering social responsibility and with their role of educating and influencing people, it is an important issue to discuss. In other words, for as long as media follow the rule of sensationalism and fail to act in a more socially responsible way, any path towards social responsibility and particularly environmental preservation will remain futile.

Finally, Frank Lefley and Vaclav Janecek wrote a viewpoint paper drawing from their previous paper (Hamplová *et al.*, 2022), this time analysing equitable target percentages for women on corporate boards asking whether quotas are the solution. Authors argue that this is a difficult question to answer and that the question can only be answered once it no longer needs to be raised. Therefore, authors poignantly argue that "when gender equality is no longer seen as an issue and men and women are treated equally, when qualifications, experience and ability are the key issues on board selection, not gender. Highlighting gender inequality issues by setting target figures may in itself deter some women from seeking board-level promotion. The target should not just be to place women in what is currently a masculinised board culture but to change this culture to reflect non-masculinity". Equality indeed should be studied more in the context of social responsibility, but this is hardly the case in the current scholarship. As the declarations on human rights and human responsibilities emphasised, and as cited earlier in this editorial, humans indeed have rights and responsibilities towards how they treat one another, and this should be included in the social responsibility debates, but for as long as we dominate and exploit the planet, it remains hardly surprising to learn that humans enforce inequality amongst one another.

For social responsibility to work, we need to communicate it effectively, which is the role of the corporate communications department when organisations are at stake, but we also need to reflect and think about what each and every one of us can do in our private lives and as part of our professional lives to make ourselves and organisations do better. As the recent COVID-19 pandemic has shown, communications have a key role in that because only excellent communications can create a more socially responsible world. But for the world, and indeed organisations, to be socially responsible we need to focus on humans. Thus, the social responsibility concept needs to have humans at its heart, and humans need to have social responsibility at the core of everything they do, be it privately or within organisations where, as the HSR concept argues, they can influence organisational behaviour and organisational communications through promoting and fostering their own values, and organisations need to listen to their employees and allow them to do good on their behalf.

Martina Topić

Notes

1. https://www.interactioncouncil.org/about-us
2. https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights

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