

# FORUM

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## PERSPECTIVES ON THE SITUATION AND A PROJECTION OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN LATIN AMERICA

Since the beginning of the 1990s we have witnessed a veritable boom in actions related to what is called “corporate social responsibility” or “corporate philanthropy” in Latin America. Many claim it is a set of marketing strategies for improving company images in society. Although there is indeed an important marketing component in this action, there is a broader and even greater impact on society as a whole. The movement aims to guarantee companies, through their appointed agents, more power to influence the formulation of public policies in compliance with society’s political agenda (Scherer & Pallazzo, 2011, Vasconcelos, Al - ves e Pesqueux, 2012).

It is difficult to draw a history of corporate philanthropy in Latin America. There are no in-depth studies about history of corporate philanthropy mainly because of the late development of our industrialization and because the “good men” carried out the social actions prior to that through the Catholic Church.

Analyzing the profile of American corporate philanthropy – understood here as donations and investments for social causes by corporations - Himmelstein (1997) revealed that the companies that seek to invest in given causes, in return for an image, try to influence the debates on certain themes. This would explain why some companies in the United States finance and support campaigns tied to controversial issues, such as abortion and the legalization of marijuana. The question of power, in the case of corporate philanthropy, does not imply an attempt at open submission of one group to another. Rather, it deals with a more subtle type of power, and perhaps at a smaller scale than any other: a presence at multiple levels of society and a place in various conversations. This permits hearing a broad range of voices and a set of interests that begin to attract serious attention almost everywhere (Himmelstein, 1997).

The same seems to happen in Latin America. Even to avoid very controversial financial problems, the organizations that represent the so-called Corporate Social Responsibility in Latin America act to “win the hearts and minds” of people, especially opinion leaders. The room for growth that CSR is acquiring in the set of commercial practices and policies in countries, in political debates and in society in general leads us to question some of the assumptions, roles and motivations companies have when they work outside their commercial ambit, and in the so-called meta-market (Baron, 1995).

CSR’s current public exposure raises doubts about the actual social and economic benefits of the set of actions. In a way, skepticism and criticism surround a major part of the debate. You can argue that the current analysis has focused more on narrative criticism and doubt regarding the companies’ intentions. Therefore, it is necessary to evaluate the debate on the role and functioning of companies in greater depth and in broader contexts, such as globalization or the construction of a public.

The call for this special issue of RAE-Revista de Administração de Empresas thus sought to show the status of social responsibility in our countries and its challenges. Therefore, it invited interested researchers to present cases of countries, corporate experiences and cross-se-

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tional themes. Based on the papers presented, we expected to close gaps in important knowledge related to the adoption of different theoretical instructions from researchers who studied CSR at the various levels of analysis. We saw the need to understand the underlying mechanisms that link CSR to results and the need for methodological focal points that helped address those significant gaps in knowledge. Thus, the challenge raised by the organizers of this call was to choose not only the best studies, but also those studies that were most representative of researcher concerns regarding Corporate Social Responsibility.

The articles that are part of this forum on corporate social responsibility in Latin America try to answer these questions using multiple focal points that precisely work on the best way to understand the general situation of this phenomenon.

In “Corporate Social Responsibility Practices in Brazilian Firms”, the authors analyzed the corporate responsibility practices at 500 Brazilian companies grouped by geographic area. Based on the theoretical framework for analyzing stakeholders and the institutional theory of organizations, the study demonstrated how different regions of Brazil recognize corporate social responsibility practices differently. This demonstrates how the geographic factors influence the positioning of the “modus operandi” of these same organizations when dealing with social problems.

The paper “Credibility of the Corporate Social Responsibility Report in Latin America” analyzes 1021 reports on Corporate Social Responsibility from Latin American companies in 12 countries from 2006 to 2010. It shows the importance given social responsibility varies according to size, country and sector in which the company operates, raising doubts about the efficacy of the same reports.

“The value of CSR for the consumer and measuring its effect on purchasing: The effect on their purchasing behavior is a different study with obvious academic and practical purposes: provide tools to companies so they can indicate which corporate social responsibility actions are better perceived by consumers for improving the company’s reputations.” “A New Approach for

Measuring Corporate Reputation” is the report of a test study using seven different variables to measure the relationship between CSR and the companies’ reputation, based on the opinion of 1500 people interviewed in Peru from a set of 69 companies. The results show that the most important variables for the best companies are not necessarily those perceived by the public in general. On the other hand, the top of mind companies for the public are not necessarily those with the best socially responsible profiles.

Finally, “Adding Values to the Value Chain” is a Peruvian study about agricultural value chains and the public-private initiatives for driving their development. It presents a matrix of critical factors and it demonstrates the special importance of corporate social responsibility themes. This special number of the prestigious RAE united guest editors to scholars for different institutions and countries who have studied and researched the corporate social responsibility agenda in Latin America for years. Our intent by coordinating this work was to propose input more for reflection, with updated research and quality on the theme. Hopefully, by compiling this excellent group of papers, we have facilitated taking that first step forward. The readers, as always, will have the final word about the degree of success at the company.

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