Organisations behaving badly – the role of communication in understanding CSI and CSR

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Abstract

CSR has become a dominant concern for management in the 21st century, with Howard R. Bowen’s 1953 book, *Responsibility of the Businessman*, being most frequently credited as laying the foundation for CSR thinking. Yet despite a long standing interest in the responsibility of organisations, transgressions do occur. This raises questions about how these occur when there is so much focus on the legitimacy of organisations in being responsible. In this chapter, we draw on metaphors of communication as transmission and meaning making to consider the communicative approaches to CSR. In doing so, we suggest that while transmission models focus on highlighting responsibility, it is within the meaning making approaches that opportunities for responsibility and irresponsibility emerge as organisations and society negotiate the boundaries of organisational behaviours. In doing so, we suggest implications for how the meaning and criteria of ethical corporate behaviour are constructed.
CSR has a relatively long tradition rooted in notions of philanthropy, but also as a reaction against business’ social transgression (Mitchell, 1989). Still, it is the 1953 book *Social Responsibility of the Businessman* by Howard R. Bowen that is most frequently credited as laying the foundation for CSR thinking (Carroll, 1999). Yet despite a long-standing interest in the responsibility of organisations, transgressions do occur. Crisisexperts.com for example suggests that more than half of corporate crises can be attributed to internal and management issues. Globalisation has brought much of the social responsibility and irresponsibility concerns to the fore as many Western companies have increased their presence in new provinces with democratic deficits, questionable human rights records, and widespread corruption. This raises questions about whether the responsibility for these matters rests with the companies to root out such practices, or whether this should be left to civil society and the governments in the host countries? In addition, both large and small companies face increasing domestic challenges related to the environment, outsourcing and contracting, as well as corruption and other forms of economic crime.

Within this environment, the CSR movement has spawned a veritable flurry of communication activity to manage perceptions of corporations’ social and environmental responsibility to society. Terms ranging from corporate social responsibility, social responsibility, sustainability, and corporate citizenship have been coined to seek to articulate the phenomena (de Bakker, Groenewegen, & Den Hond, 2005). Corporations are increasingly spending substantial amounts to issue reports, engage with stakeholders, and develop innovative social and environmental programs to demonstrate their responsibility to society. It is estimated that almost 80% of the world’s 250 largest corporations report and otherwise engage in CSR activities (KPMG, 2008). Yet at the same time, the world has witnessed some of the greatest cases of seemingly corporate irresponsibility with the global financial meltdown and bailouts, telephone hacking invading individual privacy,
environmental disasters of endemic proportions, and on-going examples of individual human abuses.

If there has ever been an institution that requires renewed scrutiny and critique, it is today’s corporation. Undoubtedly, corporations are the most powerful and influential institution in many countries, often eclipsing the government, church, and family in their impact (Deetz, 1992). As a result, and as we have seen recently, the ethical failures of business profoundly affect everyone. Ironically, however, irresponsible business corporations have received limited attention in the CSR literature.

This inevitably raises questions about what is ethical behaviour for organisations – including corporations with their massive economic clout, and social and environmental reach. We argue that communication plays a vital role where meaning is negotiated regarding what constitutes ethical behaviour. The notion of responsibility/irresponsibility necessarily has to be defined with the help of communication and there is a corridor of 'reality' that corporations must manoeuvre within. However, corporations can exploit the fact that the borders are unclear. This challenges the assumption that ethics is only an individual-level phenomenon or that ethics can be equated with legal compliance. Crises of irresponsibility can for example, be viewed as the result of corporations pushing the boundaries of what constitutes unethical behaviour or, in some cases, ignoring the tensions between profits and ethics. For example, the economic meltdown (in the U.S. and abroad) is, in many respects, a case of companies externalising their costs (and risks) onto others in ways that brought the whole system to its knees. Through this perspective, there are businesspersons who believe that repackaging bad loans so that others cannot see the risks inherent in them is ‘just good business’. At the micro level, there are multiple examples of persons being either ignored or punished for raising ethical, business-related concerns (e.g., BP oil spill).
This chapter will explore the role of communication in negotiating realities that constitute corporate social irresponsibility (CSI) and responsibility. To do this, we explore these notions within a framework of organisational communication metaphors around transmission and meaning (Putnam & Boys, 2006). First, we will present this framework as a means to analyse relationship between communication and organising. Then we consider how corporate social responsibility and irresponsibility are considered within these perspectives. Finally we raise questions about how meaning making informs the discussion on corporate social irresponsibility.

**Metaphors for organisational communication**

Organisational communication research provides a useful arena within which to consider the relationship between communication and organising as the underlying principle for understanding a contemporary organisational phenomena – corporate social irresponsibility. One such theoretical conceptualisation of the field of organisational communication was developed by Stan Deetz (2001) as a means to focus on the process of organising through symbolic interaction rather than merely on ‘communication within an organisation’. Such an approach, according to Deetz, produces a focus not so much in theories of organisational communication but in “producing a communication theory of organisations” (p. 5). This directs scholars’ attention to similarities and differences among research studies and, as such, can serve as an organising structure for exploring studies of organisational communication and CSR (see May, 2011).

As Deetz and others have noted (Krone, 2005), organisational communication scholars have made a significant paradigm shift over the past two decades from a transmission based approach to one that emphasises interaction and meaning (Putnam & Boys, 2006). The transmission paradigm emphasises managerialism and decisions about how
information is transmitted. In contrast, the meaning paradigm explores how meanings constitute organisations and organising patterns. It is through meaning making that notions of responsibility and irresponsibility can be constructed. Here we briefly discuss the transmission approach as well as meaning making processes that are useful for understanding CSR and CSI.

Metaphors in the transmission paradigm

The earliest communication models, such as the one presented by Shannon and Weaver (1949), highlighted communication as a relatively simple process involving sender, receiver, and message. While the complexity of this mechanism has evolved since that time, the role of the organisation, and of the manager within the organisation, remain prominent through the transmission paradigm.

Transmission paradigms encompass conduit, information processing, and linkage frameworks that focus on the organisation as a central site through which communication travels, albeit in different ways. Conduit research emphasises the role of communication as tool or as transmission. As a tool, studies consider the outcomes of using various media or of their relative merits. Another strand focuses on the skill of the communicator in various situations. Communication as transmission models also discuss the amount and adequacy of communication. While originally transmission type models literally emphasised the role of the sender, the agency of senders and receivers are inherent (Putnam & Boys, 2006).

A second version of the conduit approach, the information processing approach, sees the organisation as a map for guiding choices about information flows. Often these studies have focused on employees in the organisation. For example, there has been emphasis on employee satisfaction, and positive and negative feedback (Geddes & Lineham, 1996). The
third transmission approach concentrates on the linkages that communication facilitates in building relationships. Some studies concentrate on the role of communication in fostering relationships, such as organisational linkages, bringing similar individuals together (Monge & Contractor, 2001). Others however, focus on the social learning networks formed through communication-aided relationships as a forms of contagion theory (Monge & Contractor, 2001). As such, communication through the transmission lens is viewed as a relatively mechanistic approach to considering messages, organisations, and managerialism.

*Metaphors in the meaning paradigm*

Another way to consider communication is through a paradigm of meaning. This perspective allows us to move away from the functionalist imperatives of the transmission paradigm and move into viewing communication and organisation in a constructionist mode of dynamic meaning making and interaction. Studies in this paradigm focus on social, rather than economic, assumptions about organising and, as a result, explore how organisational realities are created, maintained, and transformed in and through informal stories, rituals, and other daily practices. This approach draws on social metaphors and sees the organisation as a community that requires greater personalisation in order to strengthen a unified corporate culture, as well as personal commitment and satisfaction. Researchers from this orientation seek to understand the sense-making activities of the persons they study, as a kind of translation of participants’ interests.

Two devices can be used to understand how meaning is constructed via communication. One device deals with the role of language in managing meanings around organisations (Grant & Hardy, 2004). Advocacy and issue formation by actors outside the organisation use language to create meaning around either the organisation itself or matters that will affect it (Metzler, 2001). Organisations themselves also use language in issue and
crisis management within their boundaries and with key stakeholder groups (Bridges, 2004). Language is also used in impression management work to repair the legitimacy of the organisation should it be impaired, for example, from the advocacy actions of outsiders or through meaning making around the consequences of organisational activities (Benoit, 1995).

Language studies draw on corporate rhetoric to construct shared zones of meaning to align corporate policies with the knowledge and opinions of those important for the organisation to influence (Heath & Coombs, 2006). These forms of advocacy draw heavily on language to persuade others to take on board the corporate message and positioning. The persuasive element of this communication is often concealed as informational messages by blurring text, receiver, and context (Rogers, 2000). As such, advocacy can take place both by corporations and activist or interest organisations.

A second important element in understanding meaning is the device of voice which has been employed to understand which perspectives are heard within organisational and public discourses. Employee voice may occur within either formal mechanisms of organisations or informally through day-to-day communication practices. Formally, employees may participate in formalised decision processes, engage in labour-management negotiations, seek the counsel of an ombudsperson, initiate grievance proceedings, or contribute to strategic plans, visions, and values, among others. Informally, employees may provide constructive feedback, offer suggestions, or champion ideas. Regardless of the nature of the voice, though, the intent is the same—to have some impact on how work gets done in organisations. Broader sets of publics, however, have somewhat limited opportunities for voice. Stockholders of publicly held companies may, for example, offer ballot initiatives for stockholder meetings. Leaders of NGOs may engage in dialogue to promote positive organisational change. Activist groups may stage public protests. Citizens may pursue
lawsuits or media publicity because of concerns about product quality, safety, or cost. All, in some form or another, may seek to lobby corporate or political leaders.

As such, the metaphor of meaning involves multiple social actors using communication to actively promote particular interpretations of organisations and their practices. There is a distinctly political element to this approach as some actors and some views gain prominence over others in defining agreed meanings over time. As such, the meaning making perspective offers means to consider the agency of organisations, however, this is through a perspective which is not necessarily deterministic but instead relies on both intent and opportunity. As with other constructionist perspectives in creating meanings and cognitive and institutional rules around social life, there is an ongoing tension between agency and structure (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Scott, 2001). However, as we will discuss later, this also provides the space for contradictions and paradoxes to occur.

**Application of metaphors to understand social responsibility and irresponsibility**

The metaphors of communication as transmission and meaning making provide a lens through which to consider the notions of corporate responsibility and irresponsibility as they emerge. Firstly, we consider how CSR has been treated through the transmission lens. We then outline our case for the importance of meaning making to presenting insights on corporate responsibility and irresponsibility and the role of voice

*CSR through the transmission lens*

Overall, we suggest that many studies of communication and CSR view organisations as “naturally existing objects open to description, prediction, and control” (Deetz, 2001, p. 19). Described elsewhere as ‘functionalist’ (Burrell & Morgan, 1979), these transmission approaches draw on economic metaphors and view the organisation as a marketplace of ideas
and practices that require intervention to produce structure and social order. Researchers from this perspective often accept the stated goals of the organisation and its leaders as taken for granted and pursue research that supports the efficient accomplishment of those goals. Communication and CSR, from such an approach, tends to be seen as an administrative function that includes information transfer, persuasion, and control. When we consider the CSR and communication literature and the concepts revealed through the transmission metaphor, we suggest that this perspective is inherent in a number of normative studies on CSR. A number of these reside in the public relations (Bartlett, 2011), advertising (Pomering, 2011) and marketing (Brønn, 2011) literatures as arenas of applied strategic communication.

The public relations literature for example, has largely focused on how organisations, often through the work of public relations professionals, best identify and deal with specific publics who emerge in relation to organisational activity in the bid to achieve organisational success (Bartlett, 2011). Often these studies have focused on information dissemination and channels for achieving CSR goals (Capriotti & Moreno, 2007). The marketing literature has featured a strong emphasis on social marketing and cause related marketing as means of dealing with social causes (Kotler, Roberto, & Lee, 2002). The marketing literature also considers brand building through making claims about an organisation’s green or sustainability achievements (de Chernatony, 2001). So called ‘green marketing’ focuses on highlighting environmental initiatives undertaken by companies and associated with their brands. Advertising literature suggests that organisations deliberately utilise advertising to inform audiences of their desired image (Pomering, 2011). By doing so, they present the aspects of their brand which they wish stakeholders to incorporate into their image of the company and consider it more favourably than their competitors (Dowling, 2004).
The role of channels such as the Web and reports plays an integral role in transmission approaches. Studies relating to the role of the web in social responsibility highlight for example the role of the Internet as a tool for interaction (Capriotti, 2011). Some studies emphasise harnessing the Internet for achieving organisational goals (Capriotti, 2011). Since communicating CSR directly is fraught with mistrust (Morsing & Schultz, 2006), websites are also treated as a means for interested stakeholders to seek information about CSR. The focus on stakeholders and stakeholder engagement has been studied as a form of relationship linkage mechanism including inherent issues of who is a stakeholder to engage with (Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997). Other transmission studies focus on reporting (Golob & Bartlett, 2007), its efficacy (Bortree, 2009), and usage (Birth, Illia, & Lurati, 2008).

These studies around corporate social responsibility retain an emphasis on a functionalist approach and organisational effectiveness outcomes through communication around CSR. The notion of responsibility is positioned as a norm which organisations emphasise to indicate their legitimacy by highlighting their socially and environmentally desirable actions.

What is apparent from our reading of the literature is that the notion of CSR has been the focus of much attention to articulate or reflect what constitutes responsibility against which organisations seek to strategically align their image. Some have seen it as a process of corporate social performance (Wood, 1991) with which organisations engage. Others have suggested that image building around CSR is a form of reputation building and restoration in a mediatised world (Eisenegger & Schranz, 2011). Another perspective again has viewed CSR as a compliance mechanism within the realm of governance (Kolk & Pinkse, 2010) or institutionalisation. Within these perspectives, communication has played an instrumental role in disseminating messages about corporate responsibility practices and compliance with
institutionalised and socially accepted norms, to manage legitimacy. These transmission approaches can be seen as a reaction to claims of corporate irresponsibility, but do little to help us understand the phenomena of corporate social irresponsibility. Furthermore, these transmission approaches do not assist in considering how opportunities for irresponsibility emerge in a highly institutionalised environment that organisations seek to navigate.

*CSR through the meaning lens*

We suggest that the meaning metaphor offers a richer way to understand corporate irresponsibility by allowing us to explore the ways and meanings of how responsibility and irresponsibility interrelate. Firstly, however, we consider interpretive studies which focus on corporate social responsibility.

In general, it appears that most interaction and meaning-based studies of CSR tend to focus on the attitudes (Burchell & Cook, 2006) and perceptions (Nielsen, & Thomsen, 2009) about CSR among a range of employees, typically managers. Given the earlier emergence and stabilisation of CSR in many European countries, interpretive studies have emerged there more frequently than in the United States. In some cases, scholars (Swanson, 2008; Treviño, Hartman, & Brown, 2000) have sought to understand the role of ethical leadership in CSR-type efforts, although most of the data has been anecdotal rather than empirical. When interview or observation-based interpretive studies have been conducted, the focus has been largely on middle or upper-level managers. For example, Arvidsson (2010) studied the views of management teams in large companies, seeking to ascertain their understanding of, and response to, an emergent set of practices around CSR. Similarly, Hine and Preuss (2009) focused their research on a range of perceptions of CSR among different managerial groups. Not surprisingly, managers dichotomised what they saw as the critical operations of their companies and the discretionary actions of CSR.
Morsing, Midttun, and Palmas’ (2007) research also focused on managers, whereby they explored the long history of Scandinavian companies’ integration of issues of ethics and corporate social responsibility into corporate strategies. Drawing on companies such as SparNord, Novo Nordisk, and Lego, they reported on the self-perceptions of CSR among managers in a range of companies. Although much of their discussion was a historical description of CSR’s evolution they, nevertheless, also included an interpretive account of how managers viewed changes in CSR over the years. Using a more detailed case study approach, Seitanidi (2009) discussed the role of employees in developing accountable actions as they formed and delivered a CSR initiative in collaboration with non-profit business partnerships. The in-depth analysis also offered insight for how communication can strengthen participation and mutual responsibility for the success of joint CSR initiatives. This study, though, is among the few that includes the qualitative, emergent data-gathering methods common to interaction and meaning-based research.

Work on voice

Work on voice has a longer history in understanding social matters and the CSR construct. First conceived as a means for unhappy consumers to respond to concerns over products and services (Hirschman, 1970), voice has, over time, come to embrace a broader range of employee and public reactions to corporate actions (Gorden, 1988). Voice, for example, is considered one of several responses to employee dissatisfaction with corporations. The others include exit, loyalty, and neglect. Somewhat similar responses are likely to occur among other publics that express concerns about corporate irresponsibility. That is, consumers and citizens may boycott a company (or, at the least, choose another, preferred brand), continue to purchase, albeit with a lower sense of identification, or become increasingly apathetic, ignoring corporate irresponsibility—a kind of benign neglect.
An increasingly global economy has altered the nature and scope of how and when persons will voice concerns about corporate social irresponsibility. For example, as employees are geographically distributed, it may become more difficult to organise and gain a collective voice. Second, the threat of outsourcing or downsizing looms if employees express too much dissatisfaction with their employer. Furthermore, the employment contract has changed. Finally, the social contract between employer and employee has changed so that employees now are considered ‘entrepreneurs’ who create their own brand in an increasingly mobile economy.

Yet, globalisation has afforded other opportunities for voice, among which is understanding how corporate irresponsibility emerges. Citizens from around the world are now able to converge around common sets of concerns about corporate practices (e.g., environmental degradation, bribery, tax evasion, political influence, CEO salaries, labour practices, and community impacts). In addition, the emergence of computer mediated communication (e.g., blogs focused on irresponsible corporations and social media e.g., Facebook and Twitter) has produced a migration of voice that extends beyond the corporate walls.

For the purposes of corporate social irresponsibility, voice could be differentiated along two dimensions (Gorden, 1988). It can be active or passive, constructive or destructive. As Kassing notes (2011), “making suggestions, expressing dissent, and providing critical feedback exemplify active constructive voice” (p. 36). He notes that these are active behaviours offered in the spirit of being constructive. By contrast, he explains, “listening, compliance, and cooperation are forms of passive constructive voice” (p. 36). These behaviours are still constructive, but are passive by comparison. On the destructive side of the continuum, active destructive voice includes “complaining, duplicity, and bad-mouthing,
whereas passive destructive voice involves apathy, calculated silence, and withdrawal” (p. 37). Undoubtedly, such active behaviours are clearly destructive, particularly with an organisation. Not surprisingly, the passive behaviours are less destructive by comparison but can, nevertheless, be disruptive.

A more recent typology expands upon these differentiations by emphasising the motives that are behind employee and consumer/citizen voice (Van Dyne, Ang & Botero, 2003). Pro-social voice, for example, begins from a motive to improve the corporation in response to irresponsible actions. Defensive voice derives from fear—with the goal of protecting oneself, as when community members seek redress from companies that have harmed them. Finally, acquiescent voice emerges from a sense of resignation that little, if anything, will change as a result of voice. It is largely defeatist and creates apathy and indifference.

*Linking the notions of meaning making and voice*

We have suggested that by turning attention to the role of communication as meaning making around matters of responsibility, and irresponsibility, we can reach a more articulate understanding of what constitutes each of these dimensions. The concept of voice allows us to consider how various actors dominate or subside in the meaning making process. Meaning making helps construct and articulate shared meanings around the appropriateness of corporate activity and also has the possibility of blurring meaning where there are spaces of contradiction and organisations may advocate for particular perspectives to dominate. We present here three examples to demonstrate how this takes place.

When the Australian banking industry came under public scrutiny for alleged profiteering at the expense of the community, some organisations in the banking sector took
an active role in shaping the national, and in some case international standards, of what constitutes responsible banking. Early in this crisis, the Australian Banking Association provided a detailed crisis response strategy providing a rationale for the banks’ practices. Even so, the public, activists, and eventually government continued to critique the banks and began framing their concerns in terms of social obligations and social responsibilities. Westpac Bank used this call to lead the way in defining the social responsibilities of banks. Among the devices used were policy statements, issuing social responsibility reports, and developing links with prominent community and environmental advocacy and opinion leaders. In addition, they developed a series of practices that involved and engaged communities to deal with issues and in defining socially responsible banking. Areas of contention such as bank fees and branch closures were shaped in a way that defined the banks as responsible for only charging those who were not disadvantaged. As a result, this led to Australian, but also international, indices for being socially responsible as a corporation in the banking category, as well as corporations generally. In this way, Westpac developed a legitimation strategy for their sector, but in doing so, set the benchmarks for other organisations to follow. To this day, Westpac and the Westpac Foundation continue to be leaders in defining and articulating the notion of being a socially responsible organisation.

There are other cases where corporate irresponsibility becomes integrated and legitimated as appropriate. The recent ‘economic meltdown’ represents one of the most significant issues of the day, with people experiencing one of the most devastating downturns in the global economy in several decades. The roots of the crisis are complex, encompassing questionable organisational strategy and culture, innovations in the design and use of non-transparent financial instruments, and promotion of new attitudes toward investment and risk, as well as the globalisation of investment markets, among others. These questionable organisational practices produced a series of interdependent events, which culminated in
severe investment losses for organisations and individuals, widespread mortgage failures, extensive job loss, and the rapid development and deployment of government bailout packages.

The economic meltdown of 2008–2009, is not merely an economic issue; it is, more importantly, an ethical one as well. It has been argued, for example, that the current economic crisis is the result of an on-going, systematic silencing of ethics and corporate social responsibility (May, 2009). Employees of the organisations that have failed—or have been bailed out by governments across the globe have lacked:

- requisite communication with stakeholders
- appropriate transparency regarding financial risk
- collaborative participation in key decision making
- courage to raise concerns about misconduct, and
- willingness to hold leaders accountable for behaviours that have harmed millions of people.

Questionable business practices, however, have created an important set of concerns related to CSR and corporate irresponsibility. As Deetz (2008) explained:

The concern ranges through important issues such as human rights, environmental protection, equal opportunity and pay for women and various disadvantaged minorities, and fair competition. Such broad issues are instantiated in activities such as using prisoners as workers, moving operations to environmentally less restrictive communities, offering and taking bribes and payoffs, creating unsound or wasteful
products, closing economically viable plants in takeover and merger games; also, including concerns about income disparity, declining social safety-nets, malingering harassment, unnecessary and unhealthy effects on employees, involuntary migration patterns, and rampant consumerism (p. 3460).

Over time, many of these corporate practices have become naturalised and taken for granted in ways that they are not necessarily questioned or critiqued. As such, the recent economic crisis may be legitimised as an anomaly or a matter of a few rogue companies, in other words, a ‘few bad apples’ that do not require regulation or restriction.

Another legitimation strategy is in shaping the nature of what is responsible and what is irresponsible, even in relation to mandated principles. In an interview with a Norwegian business daily, the Norwegian Minister of the Environment and International Development declared: “We have got to stop making excuses for aid and private investment in undemocratic countries. I reject the idea that investment in a country is a support for the government. It is helping to create a middle class ... and makes a transition towards democratic governance more likely” [author’s translation] (Sundnes, 2011, p. 28-29). The minister pointed to the uprisings in Egypt, Tunis, and Libya as examples, to illustrate his analysis that economic relations are of the good in the long run. The premise, he argued, is that investments are made in such a manner that the rulers do not have direct access to the funds (Sundes & Sæter, 2011). Such a perspective certainly eases the role of CSR to include a focus on such aspects as no-tolerance for corruption. This is obviously in the interest of many companies. The Norwegian oil company Statoil for instance, defended its engagement in Libya arguing that “it is a political decision to introduce economic sanctions against countries, it is not the responsibility of individual companies like Statoil. Without international sanctions against Libya [there is no reason] for Statoil to not establish
operations in the country. … We run our operations according to international laws and sanctions. Statoil is open and responsible in Libya” [author’s translation] (Therkelsen, 2011, p.18).

This provides a clear example of how an organisation has strategically used communication to blur the lines of responsibility and irresponsibility by reshaping the nature of the debate but also broadening or shifting the context of the discussion. In doing so, they shift jurisdiction on one hand, but also attempt to move cognitive framing on the other.

**Conclusion**

These examples highlight for us that organisations take a strategic role in building, normalising, and reshaping what is legitimate and not legitimate using existing structures and rationales within the broader society. They are actively involved in using communicative practices to shape meaning making around what is responsible, and normalising or validating what might have otherwise been considered irresponsible. As such we believe that corporate social irresponsibility is more than a case of personal ethics.

We noted that there appear two significant areas within which irresponsibilities appear to occur. The first was in the internal management practices as noted by crisisexperts.com and the research that shows the majority of crises occur due to management decisions and internal practices. The other occurs at the macro level revealed through globalisation. It is here that shifting jurisdictions, weak governments, and economic imbalances provide fertile ground for irresponsibility to emerge as organisations seek to negotiate business in less familiar territory.

It is within these spaces of contradictions that human praxis can engage and go beyond the institutionalised, legitimised, and taken for granted (Seo & Creed, 2002). The
CSR agenda has opened up a contradiction between economic and shareholder rationales and the broader stakeholder, social, environmental, and governance discourse. If such perspectives are socially constructed, then these are indeed corridors of reality which are open to multiple interpretations and to exploitation of the boundaries. They also provide spaces within which transgressions can be strategically reframed and normalised through communication. As such, while attention has been paid in the literature to articulating corporate responsibilities, there is also need for a counter movement to explicate irresponsibilities. This volume seeks to do this by focusing on the call that corporate social irresponsibility is in part a failure of CSR and therefore a remit of this book is to better understand violations, wrongdoings, and poor business practices that impact negatively on society and the broader environment. By attempting to legitimise both ends of the spectrum, the corridors of reality which allow contradictions to emerge are reduced if not removed.

References


