

Organization, Discourse Ethics and the Interpretation of “Political CSR”

KOME – An International Journal of Pure
Communication Inquiry
Volume 5 Issue 1, p. 1-23.
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Published by the Hungarian Communication
Studies Association
DOI: 10.17646/KOME.2017.11

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Abstract: The political theory of corporate social responsibility (CSR) claims that the current social role of multinational corporations can not be described merely with the classic and economic CSR paradigms which are based on an instrumentalist view where the various corporate stakeholders are considered in decision-making only in as much as they are powerful and able to influence the profit of the corporation (Scherer and Palazzo 2011). Scherer and Palazzo suggest that the CSR activities can be discussed from an alternative perspective. Instead of analyzing corporate responsibility from an economic or an ethical point of view, they propose to embed the CSR debate in the context of the changing order of political institutions. Based on the Habermasian understanding of *lifeworld* and *system world*, the dialogues and other corporate social responsibility practices, such as voluntary programs, staff involvement and the use of social media for the purpose of stakeholder relation strengthening, are the solutions that facilitate the possibility to bring together the *lifeworld* and the *system world* through the formation of organisation’s internal openness. Thus the initiatives of stakeholder dialogues are intended to ensure that the interest alignment between companies and stakeholder organisations is between two collective agents and occurs along the mutually agreed criteria. When we take a closer look at the corporate practice, in the case of stakeholder involvement, the companies largely determine with which stakeholders to initiate dialogue. Companies that put an emphasis on environmental and social aspects are equally valued by their investors; the Dow Jones Sustainability Index (www.sustainability-indices.com) for example, grades companies from the point of view of sustainability as a stock indicator. Therefore, ethical decisions have strategic purposes too. In order to describe the characteristic patterns of companies, stakeholder relations and social responsibility, the study reviews the related concepts and theories. It then investigates how the theories of social communication can be connected to companies’ activities related to social responsibility and organizing stakeholder relations and how objectives related to the organization of stakeholder relations are present in the strategies and processes of major Hungarian companies.

Keywords: discourse ethics, Habermas, organizational communication, stakeholder relations, political CSR