

David and Goliath Meet in the CSR Super Bowl

A Review of

*The A to Z of Corporate Social Responsibility:
A Complete Reference Guide to Concepts, Codes, and Organisations.*
Wayne Visser, Dirk Matten, Manfred Pohl, & Nick Tolhurst (eds.)
(Chichester, England: John Wiley & Sons, 2007)

and

Encyclopedia of Business Ethics and Society
Volumes 1-5
Robert W. Kolb (ed.)
(Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2008)

By
William C. Frederick
March 2008

“And there went out a champion named Goliath whose height was six cubits and a span [about 10 feet]. And he had a helmet of brass upon his head and he was armed with a coat of mail; and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of brass. And he had greaves of brass upon his legs and a target of brass between his shoulders. And his spear’s head weighed six hundred shekels of iron . . .”

“And when [Goliath] saw David, he disdained him, for he was but a youth and ruddy and of fair countenance. And David chose five smooth stones out of the brook and put them in a shepherd’s bag; and his sling was in his hand”

In heft alone, it's a blowout. Five volumes, each almost a foot high, weighing in at 10 pounds up against one book-sized runt tipping the scales at just 2 pounds. 2,500 stadium-size pages arrayed against 535 practice-field sized pages. A ticket price of \$795 versus \$110. A coaching team of 28 Americans, 2 Canadians, and 1 Dutch pitted against a lean coaching bench of 8 Europeans. A playbook filled with 877 entries contrasted with only 450 moves open to the other guys. And how many players? Oh, just a bench of 343 against 104. Is there any point in even kicking off? Hey, wait a minute. Not so fast. Let's see how it plays out. It's only a game—uh . . . isn't it?

First Half -- All Goliath

Head Coach/General Editor Robert Kolb of the Sage Team brings impressive credentials to the game. Two PhDs, in philosophy and finance, finance professor at 5 universities, prolific author (20 books), former head of a Business and Society program, business acumen galore, and now professor of finance and applied ethics at Loyola University of Chicago.

Kolb's Associate Coaches/Editors, numbering 5, can boast experience on numerous academic playing fields and as authors of well-known playbooks and strategies for putting the ball squarely through the ethics goal posts. Backing them up is an Editorial Board/Assistant Coach bunch whose job is to keep the 340+ player/authors in line and going in the right direction. ("No, dummy. Run across *their* goal line, not *ours!*") Along about here, I should admit being one of the assistant coaches/editors.

So, what has the Goliathian team produced -- besides bulk? An extensive and often authentic discussion of the academic fields known as Business and Society and Business Ethics. It will be a useful reference guide for students, teachers, laypersons, and the rare business practitioner who seek the meaning of key ideas such as CSR, BE, globalization issues, workplace rights, supply chain abuses, and all of the complicated normative problems that appear throughout the workaday world of business. This playbook is straightforward, weighty (literally), for the most part clearly written, employing little deception or secretiveness, and with enough range and comprehensiveness to satisfy the most demanding fans. And for anyone in doubt about the sources on which academics count for inspiration and experience—not to say, getting tenure and promotions—there is an Appendix of the fields' top journals and periodicals. A Reader's Guide gathers the entries/plays into 20+ themes, and an Index—142 pages all by itself—lets the curious find almost anything mentioned by the team players/writers.

Anything about Team Goliath and its overpowering strategic posture that puts them in jeopardy? Any chinks in that big brass coat of mail? Could Gargantua (oops, mixed and untimely metaphor—sorry about that, Rabelais!) have not-so-obvious vulnerability flaws? After all, it's happened before—Achilles learned the hard way. So maybe we'd better take a look now, before the 2-Minute Warning ends the First Half.

The first thing you notice is that Goliath is playing to U.S. fans. Americans dominate the 29-member coaching team – with just 3 non-U.S. representatives. The playbook is filled with plays favoring American viewpoints, interests, problems, institutions, and legal-regulatory apparatus. The coverage of other cultures and business systems is spare. A real surprise and maybe the biggest chink of all—no entry at all for the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and only a brief passing sentence about this key normative document in the Human Rights entry. Important and well-known voices are not heard—Williams, Enderle, Jones, Epstein, DeGeorge, Margolis, Mitchell, Agle, Entine, Weaver, Vogel, Etzioni—all quite possibly and understandably busy with other projects. Other omissions are puzzling—Friedman is heard but not Galbraith? Ayn Rand but not David Reisman? Weber but not William H. Whyte? Veblen but not Commons? No Dawkins of selfish-gene fame? One finds a few arcane items—does a B&S encyclopedia need an account of the USA Patriot Act? or Deadweight Loss?—well, maybe that one *would* get Goliath's attention. Then there's the question of balance or objectivity versus advocacy. Should all sides be heard—those opposed to or skeptical of CSR, as well as its supporters? Some entries—perhaps I shouldn't single them out—are clearly biased and unbalanced, while others give both sides of controversial issues and concepts.

Coach Kolb's tough job was to mold his potentially fractious players into a well-oiled team that could push their ideas across the goal line and deep into business and public consciousness. In knitting together the two scholarly fields of Business & Society (social-science-based management studies) and Business Ethics (applied philosophers for the most part), he seized upon what he calls an "inherent unity that stems from their shared primary concern with value questions in commerce. Commerce is by its very nature a normative enterprise." That view should score points in any game.

Well, overall, an impressive, hard-fought first half. All Goliath so far.

Second Half -- David, the Comeback Kid

Team David is an entirely different phenom. Trim, nimble, slender, supple, quick of access, brief-and-to-the-point, its playbook is comparatively spare while not lacking in essential coverage of key ideas and explanations aimed at the practitioner's needs and the public's questions. The focus is on today versus yesterday, current events/needs versus historic/philosophic treatises, brain buzz versus navel gazing, what must I know *now* to act rather than what might happen in some distant imagined scenario. If there is a design flaw, it's in labeling the playbook an encyclopedia, as the editors do in a Foreword. Truth to tell, it's more like the reference guide of the book's subtitle -- a manual to inform, orient, and guide the CSR seeker, whether business practitioner, NGO activist, or government policy maker -- "a jargon-busting guide to CSR," as the Introduction puts it. A nice supplement to the ICCA's CSR handbook published in 2006 -- see my review of it posted on this website -- but neither one of them qualified to play in the encyclopedia league. The team's owner is the non-profit Institute for Corporate Culture Affairs headquartered in Germany and a sponsor of CSR workshops, conferences, and corporate networking.

The coaching team here is decidedly more modest in numbers than its Goliathian opponent—only four head coaches and four assistant coaches, who direct just over a hundred players. Of those hundred authors, 60+% are UK and European, about a quarter USA, and a scattering from other continents. As we shall see, that heavy Euro-American list need not defeat the editors' aspiration of "representing the global debate on CSR rather than just a narrow Anglo-American viewpoint." The reason lies not only in the careful choice of author-contributors but primarily in the qualifications and experiences of the Coaching/Editing team itself.

A nationally diverse set of Editors—a South African, two Germans (one now at a Canadian university), and a Britisher (now living in Germany)—bring wide experience in academia, government service, banking and financial policy, CSR, sustainability practices, and teaching and research posts across several continents. The Assistant Coaches/Editors boast equally impressive professional credentials acquired in UK, Germany, South Africa, and USA. The resultant global reach of this team explains the currency and vibrancy of *The A to Z of Corporate Social Responsibility*. In a showdown with heavier and more formidable contestants, it can easily produce surprises.

A major strength stems from numerous entries about Euro-originated codes, policy guides, greenhouse-gas trading schemes, ethics networks; IFC, ILO, ISO standards; OECD guidelines on bribery, MNCs, health & safety, corporate governance; key UN and UNEP initiatives; plus clear explanations of carbon-lowering techniques. You will not find a wider display of today's key global players and their action programs than here. What it lacks in depth is countered by currency of coverage. Again, Goliath's bulk versus David's deftness.

Useful indexes guide one through the tangle of abbreviations, core terms, key terms, definitions, continental regions, industrial sectors, the numerous codes, declarations, principles, and standards of today's CSR scene, along with the main NGO players and civil society groups. Another clever feature is the ample use of Internet web site addresses accompanying most of the entries -- perhaps another symbol of this guide's currency.

As the 2-Minute Warning approaches, it's time to sum up before the final showdown in this first-ever CSR Super Bowl.

As for the SAGE Big Guy, if room can be found, put it up on the library shelf ("What's a library, Daddy?") next to its predecessors -- Blackwell's 1997 and 2005 Business Ethics encyclopedias edited by Pat Werhane and Ed Freeman, and Bob (not Bill) Frederick's 1999 A Companion to Business Ethics, where all of them can try to compete with Wikipedia.

Meanwhile, back in the executive suite where the CSR action is, you're more likely to find the ICCA's all-you-really-need-to-know *A to Z* manual as the global business practitioner's CSR reference guide of choice.

Now, for the final 2 minutes of play

ESPN Post-game Commentary

"Well, Bob, you're never gonna see another finish like that one!"

"Joe, I couldn't even imagine anything like it. Totally surreal! How about you, Jane?"

"Guys, I was totally blown away, I've got to admit. Awesome and weird at the same time. It sorta reminded me of Franco Harris and the Immaculate Reception back in '72 that won the AFC title for the Pittsburgh Steelers. Remember that one?"

"Yeah, or Mazeroski's 9th inning, bases-clearing homerun that beat the Yankees and won the 1960 World Series for the come-from-behind Pittsburgh Pirates."

"What I can't get over is he needed only one shot."

"Whad'ya mean?"

“He hadda reserve plan to use 5 shots . . . one for each of the big voluminous guys. But it took just one to bring’em all down. Really awesome.”

“You suppose today’s winner will go on to Beijing and the Olympics?”

“Why not? The World Cup, too.”

“What about it, Jane, do you see a rematch?”

“Dunno, guys. There’s these rumors about steroids . . . ya know, all that bulk . . .”

“Tell you what. Let’s rerun the tape of those final two minutes once more. I want to see it again . . . and I bet our viewers would, too. OK, guys, roll it!”

And it came to pass, when Goliath arose, and came and drew nigh to meet David, that David hasted, and ran toward the army to meet Goliath. And David put his hand in his bag, and took thence a stone, and slang it, and smote Goliath in his forehead, that the stone sunk into his forehead: and he fell upon his face to the earth.

“OK, back in a minute with more sports, but first this message from our sponsor . . .
.”