

“Longer, Wider, and Deeper Than You Realize”

**The Age of Responsibility:
CSR 2.0 and the New DNA of Business
(Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 2011)**

By
Wayne Visser

A Commentary by
William C. Frederick
June 2012

Dear Wayne,

I'm writing to tell you that, regretfully, I shall not be reviewing your new book. It pains me to bring you this news, particularly because as you must know from my previous reviews of your earlier books, I have the highest regard for you and your admirable understanding of what we once called “Corporate Social Responsibility” or “Corporate Social Performance” and you now call “Corporate Sustainability and Responsibility.”

Having twice read your book carefully and with growing admiration, damned if I could find anything to say about it that others haven't already said. After all, nearly two dozen of the world's leading lights in the CSR field—activists, university professors, film makers, sustainability pioneers, corporate consultants, NGO/CSO affiliates—endorsed your views even before the book was published. One of them even called it “an instant classic.” Wow!

Oh, I suppose I could summarize your main theme—you know, the various stages of CSR, the new principles of your CSR 2.0, plus the chances of getting everyone (especially big corporations) to go along. But that would only give some potential readers—students and their profs?—an excuse not to read the book itself, or possibly they would just convert the whole thing into a set of bullet points. So they would then miss out on the richness of your textual analysis.

I will, as a side note, say that I do indeed admire you for taking your “CSR world quest” trip around the world to talk face-to-face with all the CSR (or CR) experts. No one else has done that. And for describing the almost countless numbers of localized CR initiatives that seem to be bubbling up from inside the world's diverse ecosystems—spreading their messages and programs to reduce global poverty, lighten carbon footprints, roll back corruption, and temper the constant quest to acquire more and more “stuff.” It's the kind of global trip that all of us should take some day, if not in person then by reading about your travels among this fertile undergrowth of local CR initiatives. You make it abundantly clear that this is the wellspring of CR's future—an upwelling of hope from below rather than a top-down push.

While I'm at it, I'll take another minute or two of your time to express my gratitude to you for revealing to readers much of your own personal life and dedication to CR causes—not always an easy thing for authors to do. From the opening pages to the very end, you tell about the forces that shaped and drove you onward to find the sources of CR, and to foretell its possible future. It is indeed an inspiring story for all of us.

So, why not just do a review? Because I'd rather reinforce and strengthen your ideas about CSR 1.0's "ages and stages" and then encourage you to expand your "principles" of CSR 2.0. Your basic point about CSR 1.0 is that neither greed, philanthropy, marketing, management, nor responsibility itself made a sufficient impact on the way corporations do business. That's probably true today but you might want to see what the CSR pioneers who started it all had in mind and how they did it – from the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s. Here is a brief thumbnail sketch of the main characters and supporting infrastructure of CSR 1.0.

Conceptual Foundations of CSR 1.0:

Adolf A. Berle & Gardiner C. Means (1932)
 Howard Bowen (1953)
 Clarence Walton & Richard Eells (1961)
 Joseph McGuire (1963)
 Keith Davis & Robert Blomstrom (1966)

Faculty Pioneers (mid-1950s to mid-1970s):

George Albert Smith (Harvard Business School)
 George Cabot Lodge (Harvard Business School)
 Raymond Bauer (Harvard Business School)
 Robert Ackerman (Harvard Business School)
 Clarence Walton (Columbia University)
 Richard Eells (Columbia University)
 Neil Chamberlain (Columbia University)
 Joseph McGuire (University of Washington-Seattle)
 Sumner Marcus (University of Washington-Seattle)
 Earl Cheit (University of California-Berkeley)
 Dow Votaw (University of California-Berkeley)
 Edwin Epstein (University of California-Berkeley)
 Prakash Sethi (University of California-Berkeley)
 George Steiner (University of California-Los Angeles)
 Neil Jacoby (University of California-Los Angeles)
 William C. Frederick (University of Pittsburgh)
 Gerald Cavanagh (University of Detroit-Mercy)
 Lee Preston (University of Buffalo; University of Maryland)
 Archie B. Carroll (University of Georgia)
 Harold Johnson (University of Georgia)

Institutional Support:

The business schools listed above

Committee for Economic Development's 1971 policy statement *Social Responsibilities of Business Corporations* favoring social contracts, stakeholder advocacy, and government-business partnerships
 General Electric Corporation's sponsorship of CSR conferences
 U. S. Department of Commerce Secretary Juanita Kreps' advocacy of social audits
 National Affiliation of Concerned Business Students, initiated by Kirk Hanson
 Harvard Business Review
 California Management Review

Public Policy Advocacy:

Black (African American) Movement
 Consumer Movement/Nader's Raiders
 Pollution/Ecology/Earth Day
 Women's Movement
 Workplace Safety & Health

Goals:

Analyze intersection of business firms and societal institutions/attitudes. Increase business's social awareness. Propose voluntary corporate initiatives. Shape public policy.

Methods:

Analytic, skeptical, critical, ideologically neutral (neither anti- nor pro-business).

You may already know that a much bigger picture of CSR 1.0's beginnings and accomplishments is on the way, organized by Kenneth Goodpaster, *Corporate Responsibility: The American Experience* (Cambridge University Press, 2012). Running parallel to this CSR 1.0 development was an emerging Business Ethics field that applied philosophic principles of ethics to business activities.

My sketch above shows pretty clearly that the CSR 1.0 movement was clustered in a handful of business schools, with limited support from the business community and rather grudging interest shown by the public sector. The pre-NGO activists—blacks, women, ecologists, consumers, workers—were scattered and unequally effective in their efforts to reform corporate practices. Advocacy, not research, was the main method of CSR 1.0: generally conservative, largely academic, occasional mass demonstrations, not revolutionary. CSR 1.0's goals were to enhance business awareness, propose voluntary corporate initiatives, and shape public policy. The "social" part of CSR went far beyond corporate philanthropy. Did CSR 1.0 achieve those goals? It did indeed succeed by calling attention to social issues and needs not being addressed by either business or government. Did it go far enough? No, of course not – at least, not by today's standards. Does that mean CSR 1.0 failed? Well . . . , in your book you say "CSR is failing to turn around our most serious global problems . . . and may be distracting us from the real issue, which is business's causal role in the social and environmental crises we face." So, that leads me to your idea of CSR 2.0, what you call "the new DNA of business." But Wayne, I'm not sure there could even *be* a new CSR 2.0 if those CSR 1.0 pioneers hadn't laid down the conceptual foundations on which today's corporate stakeholders make their claims, corporate codes of conduct are proposed, social contracts and social compliance

programs are formulated, human rights are defended, and market justice is pursued. For all those reasons, I suspect the CSR 1.0 pioneers would be cheering your pursuit of CSR 2.0.

CSR 2.0 builds so well on what has gone before plus offering much that is new and worth pondering. You put sustainability and DNA—Nature itself—at CSR 2.0's very center. The five principles of CSR 2.0—creativity, scalability, responsiveness, glocality, and circularity—may indeed be indicators of DNA's presence in the business world. But while you are speaking of DNA only metaphorically, how about taking a closer look at *real DNA*—the actual genes present in all Earthly organisms—and the influence those genes exert on organic behavior, including the actions and decisions of corporate managers? More and more researchers are doing just that—evolutionary psychologists, bioevolutionists, neuroscientists, ecosystem experts, organization theorists, behavioral economists, biomimicry specialists. And you know what they are discovering? Amazing research that points in one direction: an understanding of human (and business) behavior that is greatly expanded in scale, depth, and global range.

So, for your next project, why not explore the *real DNA* influence on corporate creativity, scalability, responsiveness, glocality, and circularity? It's there to be discovered, with leads provided earlier by such pioneers as Paul Hawken and Amory & L. Hunter Lovins in particular, whom you cite. Along the way, you'll discover that the DNA is in the *people* who inhabit the corporation, not the corporate shell itself, but those human genes in employees and managers exert a powerful influence on all the corporation's activities and decisions. To get a handle on the fearsome sustainability challenges we face in today's warming planet which you have identified so eloquently, take a stroll down Organic Lane—I guess it could be called CSR 3.0. I've just produced a guidebook of sorts to guide your way: *Natural Corporate Management: An Evolutionary Interpretation* (Greenleaf Publishing, forthcoming 2012). It will be great to meet up with you somewhere on the Evolutionary Cascade as we explore our shared CSR pathways, CSR 2.0 and CSR 3.0.

With much respect and admiration for your creative work, my best wishes,

Bill