

Introduction

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This special issue of *Politeia*, bearing the title “Corporate and Stakeholder Responsibility. Theory and Practice” contains papers presented at the *Fifth Annual Forum on Business Ethics and Corporate Social Responsibility in a Global Economy* held on May 22-23, 2008, at the University of Milan, Italy and reviewed by the authors for the publication. In addition, other relevant essays – not presented at the Forum but prepared for this issue – are included.

The Forum was organized by the Research Centre Politeia, in cooperation with the Department of Law “Cesare Beccaria” (University of Milan), the Department of Political and Social Studies (University of Milan) and the Promotion Committee (composed of several well-known Italian companies and organizations). Politeia was responsible for the academic organization and supervision of the Forum, while the Promotion Committee defined the Forum’s annual agenda and guaranteed its sponsorship. The publication of this volume is particularly relevant for the Research Centre Politeia for two main reasons.

On the one hand, this special issue witnesses the success and the consolidation over time of the Politeia Forum, which today represents in Italy a point of reference in the community of scholars and practitioners in the field of business ethics and corporate social responsibility. Since 2004 onward, some of the most important scholars and experts of business ethics and CSR at international level, through their participation in the five editions of the Forum, have offered their contribution of knowledge and experience to the Italian public, discussing a number of very important issues related to the emerging ethical challenges in the global economic system: among them, how to define CSR; why CSR is a better way of doing business and the key to sustainability; what are the emerging challenges for business concerning socially responsible business practices, measurement and reporting; how companies may improve profitability and sustainability by adopting processes and tools necessary to manage their social and environmental performance in the same way as they manage their economic performance.

The next annual meeting of the Politeia Forum, the sixth, which will be held in Milan towards the end of 2009, bearing the title “Corporate and Stakeholder Responsibility for Sustainability”, will tackle corporate responsibility from the perspective of the complex interactions between business and its stakeholders within the context of the sustainability¹.

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The series of special issues of *Politeia*², of which this volume is the fifth, gathering the proceedings of each edition of the Forum, is a valuable tool for all those who work in the field and are interested in better understanding the benefits and the complexities of delivering a more sustainable and profitable business via socially responsible practices: academics, top managers, Ethics Officers and CSR managers, consultants and trainers, NGOs and stakeholders' representatives, business and union organizations, political institutions, but also media. Moreover, the five volumes of this series are though as a further contribution to the fulfilment of the main aims of the Forum: those of providing the theoretical support necessary for the programmes on business ethics and CSR recently emerging in numerous Italian companies, and of increasing companies' awareness and knowledge of the ethical and social responsibilities of economic organizations, through an approach that fills the gap between 'practitioners' and 'experts'.

Most of the contributions presented in the editions of the Forum and then published in this journal are framed in an analytical style, representing a useful contribution to Italian culture, which depends on continental frame of ethics and therefore is not interested to applied ethics. I think that philosophical attitude devoted to analysis is a precious gift to our culture. If people will start to think in an analytical way in one field, hopefully will extend such attitude to others as well.

The second reason why this special issue has a special meaning is that its publication opens the 25th volume of *Politeia*, the journal issued by the research Centre Politeia. Since the middle '80s the journal is committed in promoting discussion on the relationship between ethics and public choices.

Moving on, now, to the content of this special issue of the journal, I would like to stress that it is divided into four sections corresponding to the four main topics covered by the Fifth Forum: *I. Ethics and Economic Success*; *II. Ethics and CSR in Business Organizations*; *III. Global Corporate Citizenship*; *IV. Ethical Values in Global Business*. In addition, the volume includes a section, which develops the themes discussed during the round table concluding the fourth session of the Forum "Valori aziendali e stakeholder engagement" (Company Values and Stakeholder Engagement). This round table provided the opportunity for managers and representatives from various organizations to meet and exchange ideas and opinions with scholars and experts.

As the readers can see from a quick look at the table of contents, this issue collects the contributions of leading academics and research experts, representatives from businesses, consumer associations and NGOs, representative from professional associations, and representatives from some of Italy's institutions that are particularly active in the area of CSR. Given the large number of contributions and the richness of the themes treated, it will not be possible here to introduce all of the papers. Therefore, in the following pages I shall provide a brief summary of the main theses presented by the keynote speakers at each of the four sessions of the Forum, reproduced in this volume at the beginning of each section.

The first section is opened by the essay "Stakeholder Responsibility and Stakeholder Commitment", by Anrew C. Wicks and Jerry D. Goodstein. In this

paper, the authors “explore stakeholder responsibility and the role it plays in fostering and sustaining commitment among firms and stakeholders”, by analyzing three domains of critical importance: shared purpose and values, trust, and integrity. The thesis of the authors is that “If stakeholders have responsibilities, as well as rights, then their stake in business relationships goes beyond what stakeholders are owed by firms. This stake is defined in great part by what stakeholders owe to the firms and other stakeholders with whom these stakeholders interact. Stakeholders are therefore more than claimants with legitimate expectations regarding how firms address their rights and interests — they are moral agents as well (...) responsible for considering the rights and interests of others and mutually responsible for fostering ethical and effective business relationships with firms and other stakeholders”.

In the second section, Patricia Werhane, in the essay “Corporate Responsibility: CSR or Corporate Moral Responsibility? The Difference it Makes in Global Settings”, focus on the different uses of the term “CSR” and concludes that “... one should shorten the term CSR to ‘Corporate Responsibility’ [deleting the word ‘social’]. CR is a term that covers all the bases, it avoids the implication that corporate responsibility is, or is merely, discretionary and circumvents the conclusion that companies are responsible for everything with which they might come into contact, and using that term may avoid some of the unwanted implications of both CSR and business ethics”. CR works well with systems thinking and the alliance approach illustrated by Nike, and with Novartis’s hierarchical prioritization of its responsibilities and obligations. The main reason to adopt the system thinking and the alliance approach is moral: “From the point of view of rights and justice, an alliance model brings into focus the responsibilities as well as rights of various stakeholders, not merely the corporation”.

In the third section, the essay “Corporate Citizenship: The Leadership Challenge from the Changing Global Context”, by Sandra Waddock, argues “that significant and relatively new global pressures and forces are creating a context in which the very purpose of the firm is now beginning to be questioned from a social contract and sustainability perspective, changing the fundamental relationship of business in society”. The result of the redefinition of the aim of the firm is the necessity of new leadership skills. According to the author, “additional and harder-to-gain leadership capabilities may well be needed to cope with the potentially stakeholder- and sustainability-driven, transparent, accountable, and publicly-purposed corporation of the future”.

Laura Hartman and colleagues open the fourth section of the issue with the essay “Translating Corporate Culture around the World: a cross-cultural analysis of whistleblowing as an example of how to *say* and *do* the right thing”. The article focuses on whistleblowing as an example of one easily identifiable area where sensitivity to cultural differences is particularly important and examine how cultural factors can be integrated into internal employee reporting mechanisms. The challenge is to get workers to use this kind of mechanisms, with the awareness that, in order to obtain this goal, a strong ethical corporate culture and leadership support are often not sufficient. According to the authors, reporting policies and procedures

must be “translated locally”: “On a country by country basis, policies and procedures are effective only when they take into account local legal environments, history, social norms, experience and logistics. (...) If MNEs want policies and procedures to be followed, they must adapt them to local conditions so that people know how to rely on them and why to use them”.

I should conclude with a few acknowledgements.

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Notes

¹ More details about the Annual Forum past editions are available in the web page: www.politeia-centrostudi.org/forum.

² The proceedings of the First, Second, Third, and Fourth Forum, edited by Emilio D’Orazio, are published in *Notizie di Politeia*, respectively under the title “Business Ethics and Corporate Social Responsibility in a Global Economy” (n. 74, 2004), “New Perspectives on the Stakeholder View of the Firm and Global Corporate Citizenship” (n.82, 2006), “Corporate Integrity, Ethical Leadership, Global Business Standards. The Scope and Limits of CSR” (n. 85/86, 2007), “Restoring Responsibility: the Accountable Corporation” (n.89,2008).