

The Evolutionary Journey of CSR

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Abstract

During the last century businesses have grown phenomenally. Some of them having annual budget higher than GDP of many developing countries. On the other hand many of them not only moved down from Fortune 500/ Global 500 list but disappeared from this club. Those who have sustained and grew have been observed to be serving not only to stockholders but society at large. Social responsibility assumed by the businesses have paid them rich dividend over a long period. This has led to a new discipline of management discipline of ‘Corporate Social Responsibility’, which has become part of management course in many institutions. Off late the companies have given a new dimension to CSR by aligning the same to the core businesses strategies. CSR has moved quite far from the religion/ philanthropy and today is in the domain of the strategy. Companies have started reporting their CSR activities in their annual reports along with the financial results. They have understood it well that, financial performance is entwined with good social and environmental performance. However, there still is not sufficient literature to understand the symbiotic relationship between economic and social performance. The present paper makes an attempt to conceptualize the evolution of CSR as a notion.

Key Words: *Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Strategy, Stakeholder theory,*

Sustainability

"You cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today"

- Abraham Lincoln

Introduction

Gone are the days when state used to be lone caretaker for the welfare of the people, now a days business is joining hands with government in adding value to the society from cradle to grave it delivers beyond its traditional domain of financial performance. The lofty ideas of symbiosis, giving back to the society, sensitization of human beings towards protection and preservation of natural resources, responsibility towards community well being, firstly came from the social institution 'religion'. Right from the start of human civilization, religions have been caretaker of embedding ethical and moral values in all the sections of the society. Religion, as a powerful institution, has been playing a key role deciding the human lifestyle and so the mode of business operation because of its being part of the society. The ideals propagated by religion have received high recognition. Therefore, businesses across the globe abide by these. Although, business traces its roots deep in financial concerns/ or profitability, yet, it has been recognizing from long back that the same is generated from the customers who are none other than community itself.

Business had been bearing cumulative social costs incurred by its own activities. It adopted more philosophical way to be socially and ethically responsible following the value and belief system established by any religion or philosophy. It trusted more on making temples, mosques, churches; funding or running orphanages and educational institutes; and more or less donating for social cause. However, there was hardly any well established linkage between those ethical or moral acts and the business objectives. The very fact that business is being socially

responsible lies in the elemental reason of business existence which has been refurbished from earning profit to adding value to the stakeholders.

The confluence of all the three occupations (social, environmental and economic) is equally applicable to corporate social responsibility as it is to sustainable development (See Annex 1). Earlier businesses were more focusing on financial goals so their strategic initiatives and annual reports were packed with achieving the same. However, with growing environmental and social concern in the world motivated them to initiate into environmental and social domains. It was realized that the environmental, social and economic costs businesses incur shall be bearable, equitable and foremost sustainable.

It is interesting to know when in post independence period (early 1950's) Indian industry was being set up by the great business visionaries and entrepreneurs, tangible reflections of embedded ethical values were traced in India which may very well be counted as early initiatives of corporate to be responsible towards society. Jamsetji Tata (1839-1904) who was more than merely an entrepreneur who helped India took her place in the league of industrialised nations. It will be relevant to quote Late J. Tata here;

"Be sure to lay wide streets planted with shady trees, every other of a quick-growing variety, be sure that there is plenty of space for lawns and gardens, and reserve large areas for football, hockey and parks. Earmark areas for Hindu temples, Mohammedan mosques and Christian churches."

"We do not claim to be more unselfish, more generous or more philanthropic than other people. But we think we started on sound and straightforward business principles, considering the interests of the shareholders our own, and the health and welfare of the employees, the sure foundation of our success."

The sixties

Although the roots of responsible behavior of businesses can be traced long back yet, in an academic literature formal writings on social responsibility are largely a product of 20th century, especially the past fifty years (Carroll, 1999). Since the seminal work “Social Responsibilities of the Businessman”, there has been a shift in terminology from the social responsibility of business to CSR (H R Bowen, 1953). The modern era of social responsibility may be marked by this contribution and *H R Bowen* shall be called ‘the father of Corporate Social Responsibility’ (Carroll, 1979).

“The social responsibility of business encompasses the economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary expectations that society has of organizations at a given point in time.” (Carroll, A. 1979)

Before going unidirectional into CSR history, it would be relevant to recall world scenario at that time which proved to be conducive for its emergence and further growth. The world had gone through a major trauma of world war (II) and it was focusing on peace and socio-economic development. After the end of World War II and colonial era, several newly independent nations emerged. Non- Alignment Movement was started by these countries in order to focus on growth and economic development and to avoid futile involvement in cold war. *Bretton Woods Conference (1944)* had already resulted in to formation of IMF and World Bank. The *General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)*, which was created in 1948, continued to operate for almost five decades and later on it was succeeded by WTO on 1st January 1995.

The aftermath of industrial revolution had suddenly changed the world. Natural resources were used and transported on a massive scale - coal, iron ore and clays were mined on a scale that created huge scars in the landscape. Factories were built in most towns and cities and the

population began to grow. Towards the end of the 1950s and in the 1960s people began to recognise that technology and economic growth were not always positive and that they could have tragic side-effects (pollution and a steady reduction of resources). From there world community started paying serious attention to the new way of development, popularly known as ‘Sustainable Development’ (See Annex 2).

"Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

(Brundtland Commission, Our Common Future, 1987)

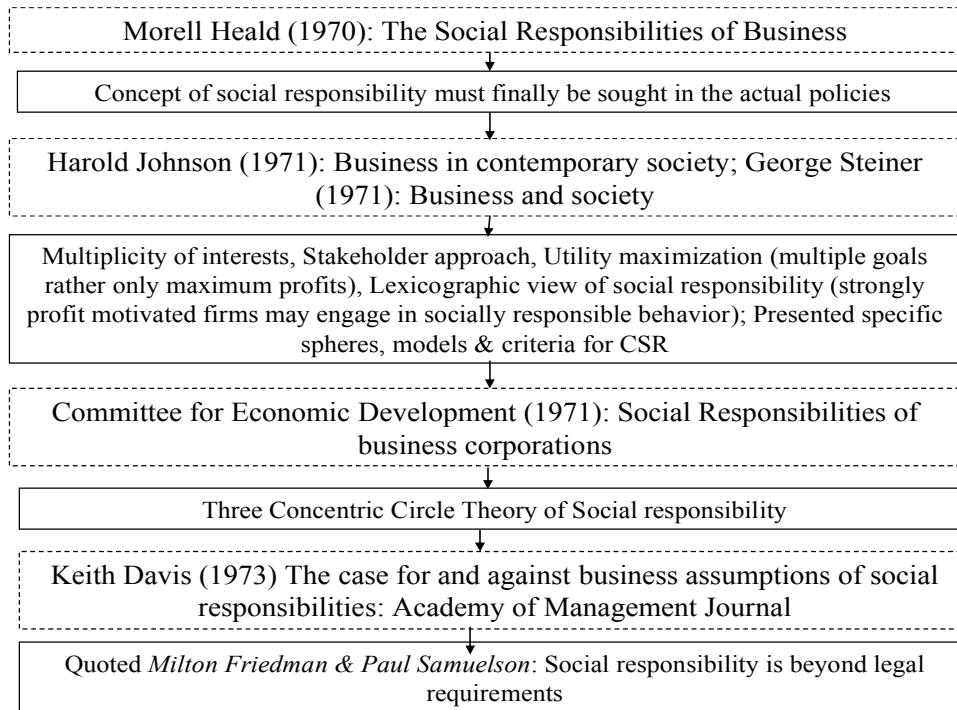
The major breakthroughs through which marks of sustainable developments can be traced are mentioned below:

- *The Limits to Growth (1972)*: Published by the Club of Rome, the report challenged the idea of progress, on the grounds that it failed to acknowledge the obvious truth that resources are finite, and hence growth dependent on resources can not be endless.
- *UN Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment (1972)*
- *World Conservation Strategy (1980)*: prepared by the IUCN with UNEP and WWF, promoted the idea of environmental protection in the self-interest of the human species.
- *Environmental disasters in mid of eighties*: The interest in sustainability that flourished during that period was spurred by a series of incidents, including Bhopal (1984), Chernobyl (1986), the hole in the Antarctic ozone layer, leaking toxic chemical dumps, such as Love Canal, general fears about chemical contamination and conflicts over decreasing natural resources such as forests and fisheries.

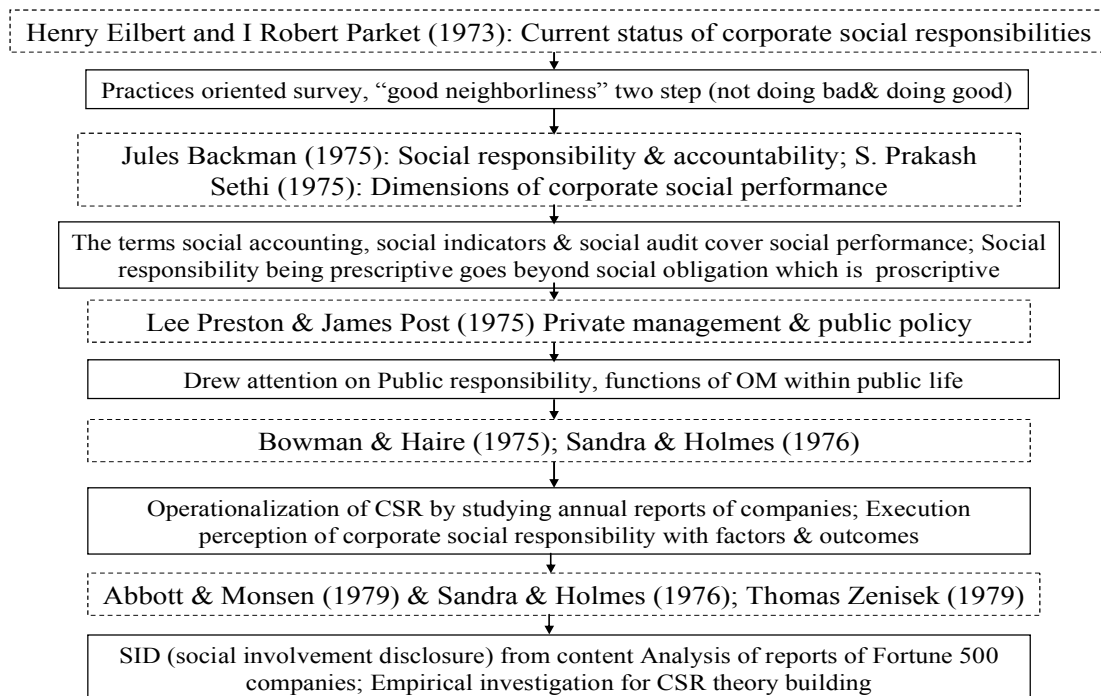
- *Our Common Future* (1987): the UN-sponsored Brundtland Commission released a report that captured widespread concerns about the environment and poverty in many parts of the world.
- *UN Conference on Environment and Development/ Earth Summit* (1992), Rio de Janeiro: World attention on sustainability peaked at the event. *United Nations Millennium Summit* (2000), New York: Goals were declared by UN to speed up growth of developing part of the world so that it can pace up with the rest developed world.
- *United Nations Climate Change Conference* (2007), Bali: Representatives from over 187 countries struggled to find a roadmap to save the earth, especially developing countries, from the disastrous effects of climate change due to global warming caused by various industrial and developmental activities. The conference encompassed meetings of several bodies, including the COP 13, the MOP 3, together with other subsidiary bodies and a meeting of ministers.

Growing environmental concerns, coupled with public pressure and stricter regulations changed the way people do business across the world. It's focus on sustainable development supported CSR movement. Keith Devis (1960) wrote extensively on CSR and suggested that even though CSR is nebulous idea but it should be seen in a managerial context. He set forth his famous "Iron law of responsibility" which stated "social responsibilities of the businessman shall be commensurate with social power." Further, in the decade of sixties, William C. Frederick (1960), Joseph W Mcguire (1963) and Clarence C Walton (1967) flashed light on CSR and described it more precisely. In seventies clearer definitions and boundaries started emerging as depicted below:

The seventies: Defining outer boundaries of CSR



Flowchart (1) 1970s (I)



Flowchart (2) 1970s (II)

It appears C. C. Walton (1967, pg. 18) had foreseen these developments well before the time. In his words;

“In short the new concept of social responsibility recognizes the intimacy of the relationship between the corporation and society and realizes such relationship must be kept in the minds of the top managers as the corporation and related groups pursue their respective goals.”

At the end of seventies prominent author Carroll (1979) proposed a conceptual model of CSP:

- (i) A basic definition of CSR
- (ii) An understanding of the issues for which social responsibility existed
- (iii) A specification of the philosophy of responsiveness

In this seminal contribution, four component definition of CSR was ingrained. The social responsibility of business encompasses the **economic, legal, ethical & discretionary** expectation that a society has of organizations at a given point of time.

In seventies, the CSR movement gained momentum from the favorable surroundings across the globe. It was the seventies which started a mainstream affirmation of the environmental issues early activists from the '60s, such as *Rachel Carson* and *Murray Bookchin* had warned of. On economic front United States experienced a recession, but the economy of Japan prospered. The economies of many third world countries continued to make steady progress in the early 1970s, because of the *green revolution* (The term "Green Revolution" was first used in 1968 by former USAID director William Gaud). The consensus among some agronomists is that the Green Revolution allowed food production to keep pace with worldwide population growth. The Green Revolution has had major social and ecological impacts; it increased the use of pesticides, adversely impacted water resources resulting in salinization, water-logging, and lowering of water tables. In the late 1950s, Carson turned her attention to conservation and the environmental

problems caused by synthetic pesticides. The result was *Silent Spring* (1962), which brought environmental concerns to an unprecedented portion to the American public. The world community had clearly acknowledged the negative aspects of agricultural expansion as the 1992 *Rio Treaty*, signed by 189 nations, generated numerous national Biodiversity Action Plans which assign significant biodiversity loss to agriculture's expansion into new domains.

The eighties

Later on, the decade of eighties faced major environmental hazards such as; Bhopal disaster (1984), Chernobyl (1986) and in turn sensitization in the world community towards environmental safety and security rapidly increased.

The environmental issues in eighties include;

1987 — Report of the *Brundtland Commission*, on sustainable development.

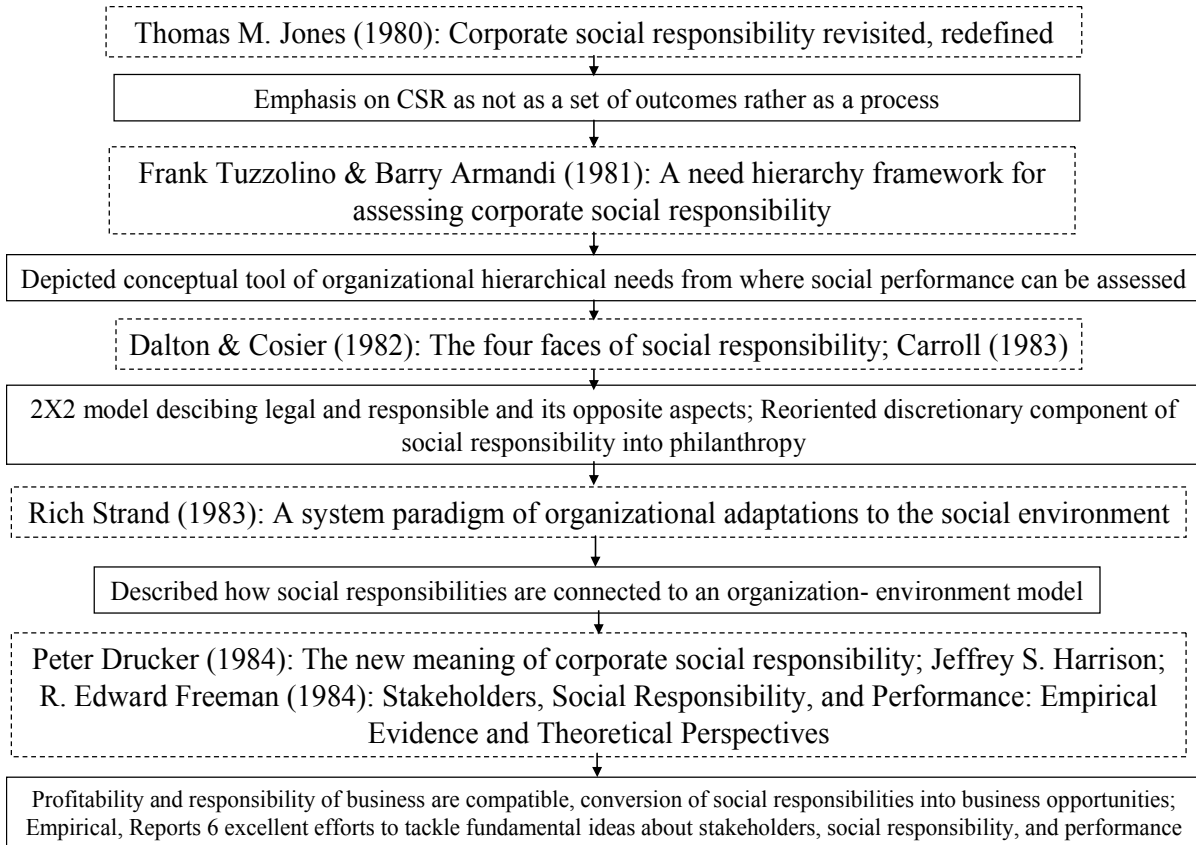
1988 — *IPCC* was established by the WMO and the UNEP to assess the "risk of human-induced climate change".

1989 — *Montreal Protocol* on substances that deplete the ozone layer entered into force on Jan 1.

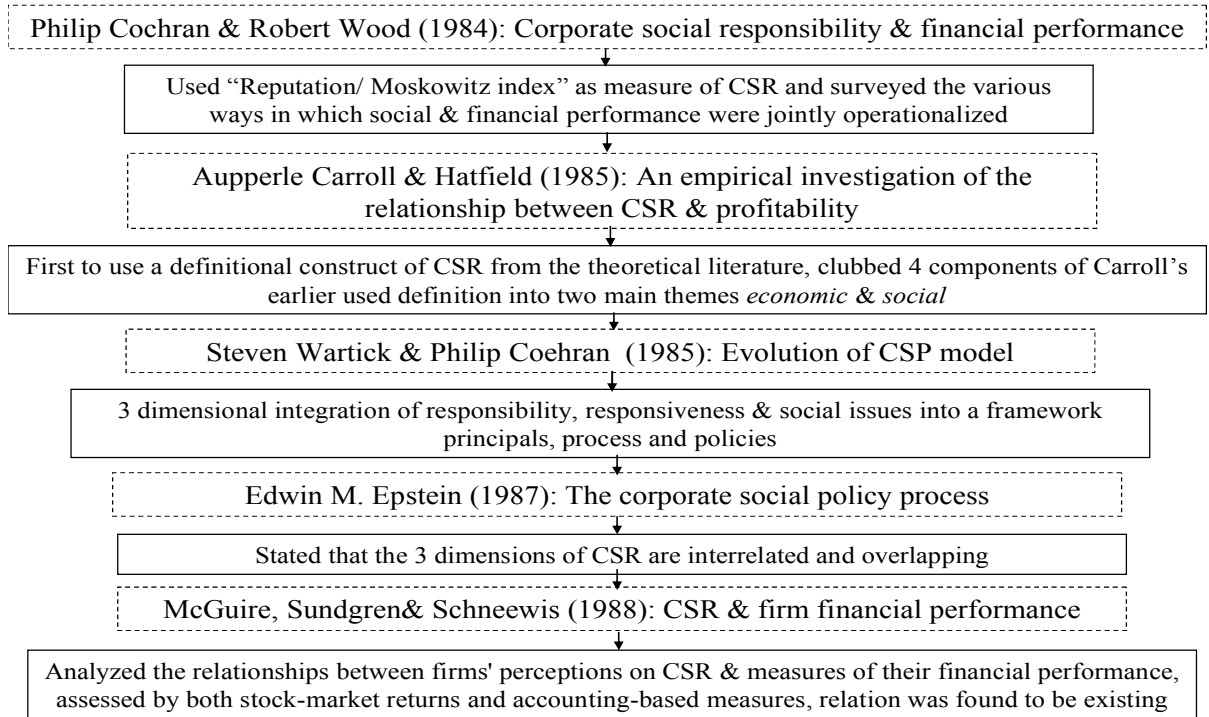
It can be observed by bisecting the decade of eighties into first and second half, that CSR as a concept in eighties was broadly focused on two themes. In first half the focus was more on defining how CSR is connected in an organizational framework, and the process through which CSR activities can be incorporated in to a business organizational setting. However, the second half's spotlight was on where the linkages are lying between business's social and financial performance, thus, making CSR an interesting & relevant issue for practice in business organizations.

In eighties, approach to define CSR diversified and hence several related concepts and themes were developed such as; corporate social performance, stakeholder theory, responsiveness, public accountability etc. Below mentioned flow chart, visualize development of CSR in 1980s;

The eighties: the financial linkages of CSR



Flowchart (3) 1980 (I)



Flowchart (4) 1980s (II)

Explicit costs of corporate social responsibility are minimal and that firms may actually benefit from socially responsible actions in terms of employee morale and productivity (Moskowitz, 1972; Parket & Eibert, 1975; Soloman & Hansen, 1985). Assuring achievement of financial goals (shareholder approach) is a prerequisite for any ‘for profit’ organization to be involved in socially responsible activities (stakeholder approach). That is why in this decade firm’s performance appraisal was done in terms of accounting and stock-market-based measures, risk which decides the nature of social responsibilities and effects corporate social performance. This exercise prepared a sound foundation for CSR as a discipline, to flourish further, both practically and theoretically.

The nineties

The next decade, 1990s were characterized by swift expansion of *globalization* following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. IT revolution increased economic productivity, while high levels of private investment in equity markets increased individual prosperity. As the successor to the GATT, the WTO came into being on January 1, 1995 to ensure that trade flows as smoothly, predictably and freely as possible among member states. The WTO broadly induced various 'reactive' corporate social responsible initiatives among member nations, affecting their export-import policies, by imposing various environmental and social restrictions on goods. CSR was being concretely shaped by rigorous researches with receiving impetus from codes and principles issued by multilateral organization. It was the decade when alternative themes such as Corporate Sustainability, Corporate Social Performance, Triple Bottom Line etc. developed.

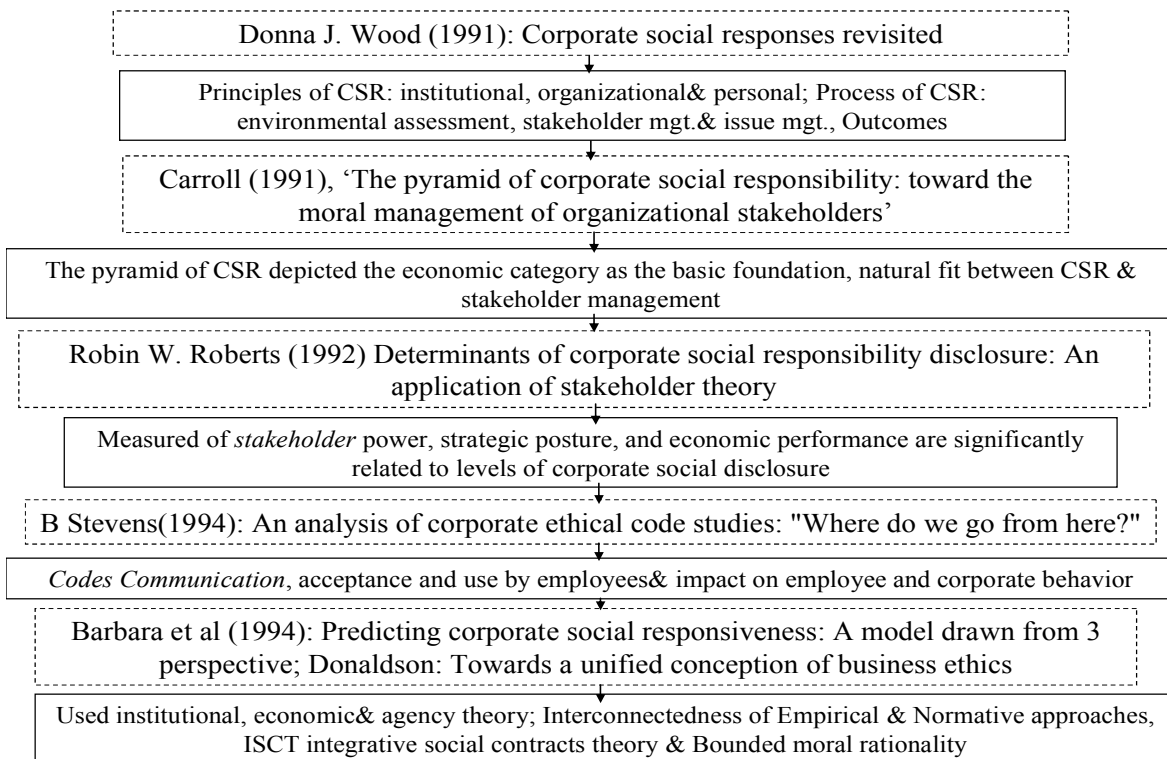
Though seeds of 'Stakeholder theory' were sown in by Bearley- Dodd dispute long back, it was firmly propounded in this decade which is different from shareholder theory and stockholder dominance. The economic and social purpose of the corporation is to create and distribute increased wealth and value to all its primary stakeholder groups, without favoring one group at the expense of others (Clarkson, 1995). It has been demonstrated that the pursuit of this (shareholder view) single measure is self-defeating (Clarkson, 1988).

The study process to give a concrete shape to CSR became much rigorous. There had been incessant attempts to provide empirical support to the theory of CSR and related theoretical concepts to make these more practicable and relevant for industry. Earlier attempts which had been initialized in the second half of eighties to find linkages between businesses financial and social performance were firmly continued in this decade. Griffin et al. (1997) analyzed

substantial 25 year of research data to explore the relationship between corporate social performance and corporate financial performance.

Below mentioned flow chart identifies few major landmarks in the course of conceptual development of CSR in 1990s:

The nineties: emergence of the alternative themes

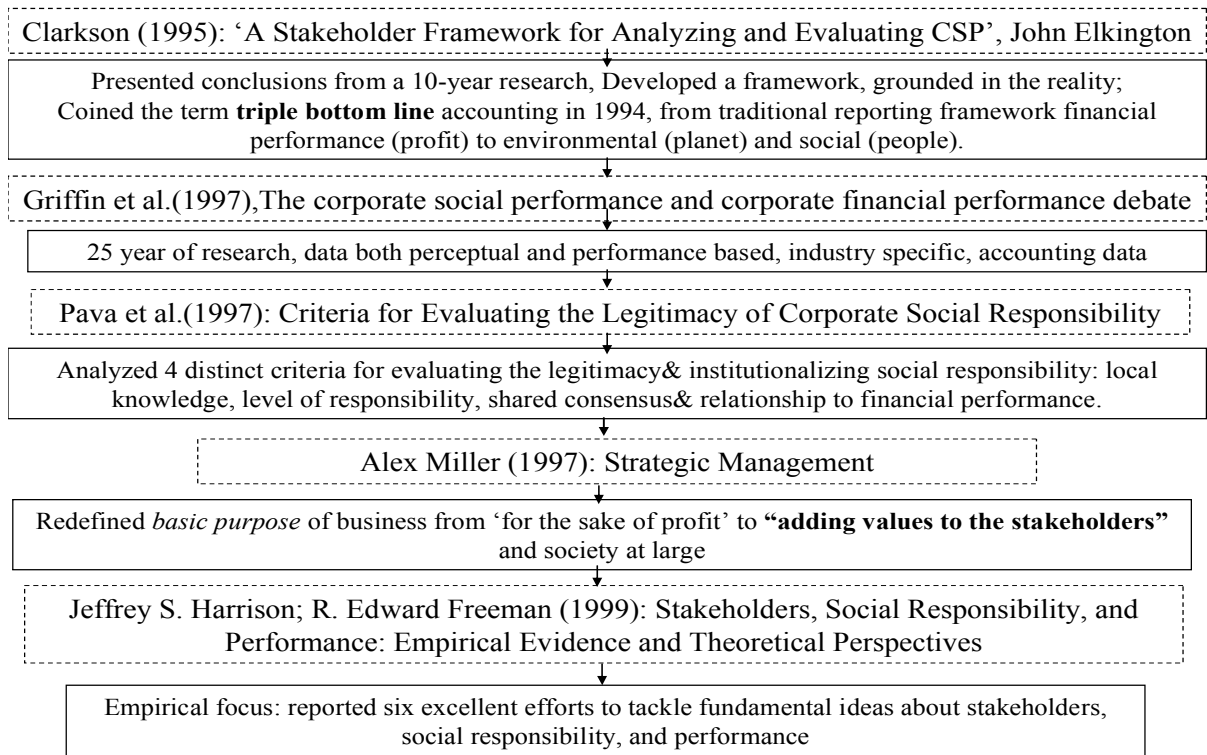


Flowchart (5) 1990 (I)

In early nineties most studies of corporate social responsiveness/ responsibility were focusing on the relationship between CSR and profit. However, Barbara et al (1994) used three perspectives (institutional theory, economic theory and agency theory) to explain CSR. They stated, 'Industry norms, market share and indicators of management reputation predict variance in CSR. The combined perspectives improve understanding of both CSR and the CSR-profit

relationship in two ways. First, CSR levels and their relationship with profit will vary by industry. Second, stock market measures and accounting measures will respond differently to CSR measures. Stock market measures lead, while accounting measures lag, CSR.’

Along with this other significant environment consciousness generating events occurred across the decade, which strengthened the CSR pathway.



Flowchart (6) 1990 (II)

Some of them are; Protocol on Environmental Protection to the *Antarctic Treaty* (1991), *Global Environment Facility* (GEF), *the Earth Summit*, Rio de Janeiro (1992), *Ecological footprint* (1992) and *the Kyoto Protocol* (1997) was negotiated in Kyoto.

Simultaneously, global business environment started realizing that an exhaustive revamp was a must after *Enron* and other major accounting and corporate governance scandals. It pushed the governments to review related regulations and induced businesses to reframe their strategies.

Business felt intense need to incorporate responsibility and responsiveness at all strategic levels (operational, Business & corporate). Here, CSR took a new form and started converting in to *Strategic CSR*. Under which the policies started being knotted with all the 3 strategies (Corporate, Business and Operational) of businesses.

New Millennium: The launch of CSR Reporting Initiatives (See Annex 3)

21st century has been dominated by several wide-ranging topics, including international trade, concerns over energy supplies and global warming, the explosion in telecommunications, a growing concern with international terrorism and war and an escalation of the social issues of the 1990s. UN estimates that world population will reach 9.1 billion by mid-century. Such growth raises questions of ecological sustainability and creates many economic and political disruptions.

GRI¹:

Global Reporting Initiative was formed by the US based non-profits Coalition for Environmentally Responsible Economies (CERES) and Tellus Institute, with the support of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in 1997. It released an “exposure draft” version of the Sustainability Reporting Guidelines in 1999, the first full version in 2000. In the year 2002, Earth Summit, was held in Johannesburg. The second version of GRI was released at the World Summit for Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, where the organization and the guidelines were also referred to in the Plan of Implementation signed by all attending member states. Although the GRI is independent, it remains a collaborating centre of UNEP and works in cooperation with the United Nations Global Compact. World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) has developed outlines of GRI Initiative. The latest version of GRI was

¹ http://www.globalreporting.org/NR/rdonlyres/ED9E9B36-AB54-4DE1-BFF2-5F735235CA44/0/G3_GuidelinesENU.pdf

launched in Amsterdam in 2006. The G3 guidelines build upon the tried and proven 2002 guidelines, which are in use by upwards of 1000 organizations, including Microsoft, ABN Amro, Anglo American, Nike, Gap, Petrobras and Novartis. The guidelines are widely recognized for bringing sustainability reporting into the business mainstream.

The new G3 guidelines are simpler, help organizations focus on material issues and support improved sustainability performance. They are harmonized with the UN global compact, are more useful for investors and analysts and bring corporate governance into sharp focus. Senior business leaders say the time has now come for all business to report their sustainability and use G3 guidelines.

UN Global Compact:

The United Nations Global Compact is an initiative to encourage businesses worldwide to adopt sustainable and socially responsible policies, and to report on them. Under the Compact, companies are brought together with UN agencies, labour groups and civil society. It was officially launched at UN Headquarters in New York on July 26, 2000. The Global Compact Office is supported by six UN agencies: the *United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*; the *United Nations Environment Programme*; the *International Labour Organization*; the *United Nations Development Programme*; the *United Nations Industrial Development Organization*; and the *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime*.

On June 24, 2004, during the first Global Compact Leaders Summit, the Secretary-General announced the addition of a tenth principle against corruption. This step followed an extensive consultation process with all Global Compact participants. It includes participation of more than 3,000 companies from all regions of the world.

The Four areas and Ten Principles of Global Compact²

Human Rights

Principle 1: Businesses should support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights; and

Principle 2: make sure that they are not complicit in human rights abuses.

Labour Standards

Principle 3: Businesses should uphold the freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining;

Principle 4: the elimination of all forms of forced and compulsory labour;

Principle 5: the effective abolition of child labour; and

Principle 6: the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.

Environment

Principle 7: Businesses should support a precautionary approach to environmental challenges;

Principle 8: undertake initiatives to promote greater environmental responsibility; and

Principle 9: encourage the development and diffusion of environmentally friendly technologies.

Anti-Corruption

Principle 10: Businesses should work against corruption in all its forms, including extortion and bribery.

Triple Bottom line:

In 1994 John Elkington coined the term triple bottom line accounting, expanding traditional reporting framework from financial performance (profit) to environmental (planet) and social

² <http://www.unglobalcompact.org/AboutTheGC/TheTenPrinciples/index.html>

(people). Later on, it was later expanded and articulated in his work ‘Cannibals with Forks: the Triple Bottom Line of 21st Century Business’ (1998).

Social Accountability International's SA8000 standard³:

SAI began in 1997 when Alice Tepper Marlin and the Council of Economic Priorities (CEP) established it. In 1998, SAI convened a multi-stakeholder Advisory Board to develop SA8000, a global standard for human rights at work. In 1998, first organizations were accredited to audit for SA8000 compliance; today SAI contracts with Social Accountability Accreditation Services (SAAS) for licensing and oversight of auditing organisations to certify compliance with SA8000. In 2001, SAI worked with Transparency International (TI) to issue "Business Principles for Countering Bribery" for public consultation. SAI provides training for auditors and a Professional Series of courses for brands and for suppliers. As of June 2007, 680,000 workers in 65 countries and 70 industrial sectors were employed at 1,373 factories, stores and farms certified to SA8000. SAI has programs in Europe, China, Vietnam, Central America, Turkey, and others.

AccountAbility's AA1000 (1999)⁴:

AA1000 provides a framework to help organisations build their accountability and social responsibility through quality social and ethical accounting, auditing and reporting. It addresses the need for organisations to integrate their stakeholder engagement process into their daily activities.

³ <http://www.sa-intl.org/>

⁴ <http://www.accountability21.net/publications.aspx?id=402>

The Framework provides guidance to users on how to establish a systematic stakeholder engagement process that generates the indicators, targets, and reporting systems needed to ensure to ensure greater transparency, effective responsiveness to stakeholders and improved overall organisational performance. In the year 2007, the global application of the Accountability Rating was extended up to world's 108 countries. Along with these there are several other reporting frameworks such as FTSE4Good Index Series and others.

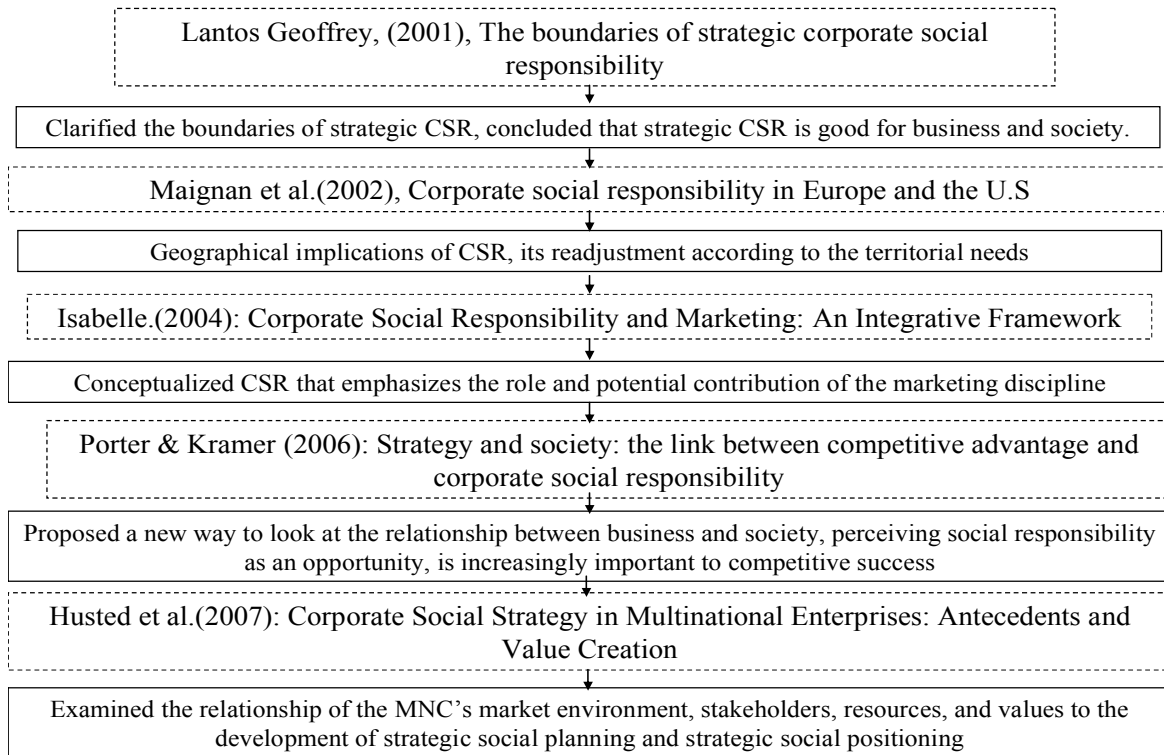
In present decade CSR has started fusion and merger with different domains of management in businesses and academics. It started to share close proximity with marketing (Isabelle, 2004), operations, human resources, entrepreneurship (social entrepreneurship) and other domains. However, strategic management proved to be the most probable platform where CSR could gain significant recognition as well as all its probable positive outcomes. Literature saw increased emphasis on aligning philanthropic activities with the business goals (Smith, 1994; McAlister and Ferrell, 2002). The need to incorporate CSR right in to strategy of firms was intensely felt. Boundaries of strategic CSR and its benefituality for business and society was traced (Lantos Geoffrey, 2001). It became another focus of CSR studies as to find out which the geographical limitations, and how it changes concomitantly with changing territorial boundaries (Maignan et al. 2002).

Stakeholder view is gaining currency and it is being considered as the source of competitive advantage in place of a liability (Porter 2002, Prahalad 2004). The three layers of the firm's stakeholders all sit within the larger context of a globalizing business environment driven revolutionary technology that is raising the importance of CSR for business today.

The firms are mainly concerned with the organizational and economic stakeholders of the firm; however these two come from the larger group of societal stakeholders. These layers are

not nonporous but closely inter-phased and interconnected with each other. All stakeholders influence each other and co-exist in a synergitic way for the sustainable performance of a firm (See Annex 4).

21st century: Emergence of Strategic CSR



Flowchart (7) CSR in 21st Century

A number of firms identify CSR practices with the core strategy and policy of the company based on the importance given to (Husted Bryan W. et al. 2007):

- (1) Defining a plan for social action,
- (2) Intensity of investment in social programs,
- (3) Commitment of employees,
- (4) Perceived impact of social action on competitive position, and

(5) Measuring outcomes of programs

A significant event expressing increased recognition of CSR in industry, was observed recently, when WBCSD and the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) jointly organized *Global Business Day* during the 13th Conference of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Bali. The name of the event, '*Tri Hita Karana*', was derived from the Balinese philosophy of life, which emphasizes that happiness can only be attained if the Creator, people and nature live in harmony with each other. It reflects the objectives of *responsible business, balancing people, the planet and profit as the basis for sustainable development*.

The concepts described above clearly show that whether stockholder and management of a company like it or not, the corporate managers have no options but yield to the Stakeholders theory. Leading companies in the world who want to remain sustainable earmark certain percentage of profit to discharge social and environmental responsibility which in turn contributes to long term economic returns apart from making the company respectable in society. The experience of companies who have sewed CSR in their business strategies shows that the money in social and environmental care more than returns in economical terms through better acceptance of products and services, rebating taxes and lower consumption of input material and energy. The major limitation of this paper is that it leaves a gap to define how businesses involve CSR activities into their core strategies which may be either reactive or proactive exercise of the firms. However, this article is confined only to explain the process of CSR's emergence as a notion and which factors proved to be supportive in its evolution.

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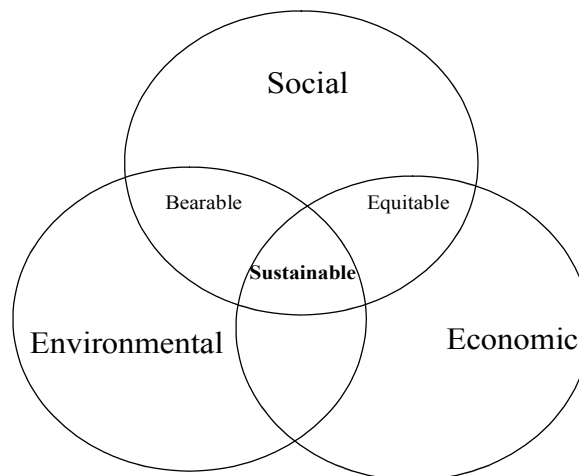
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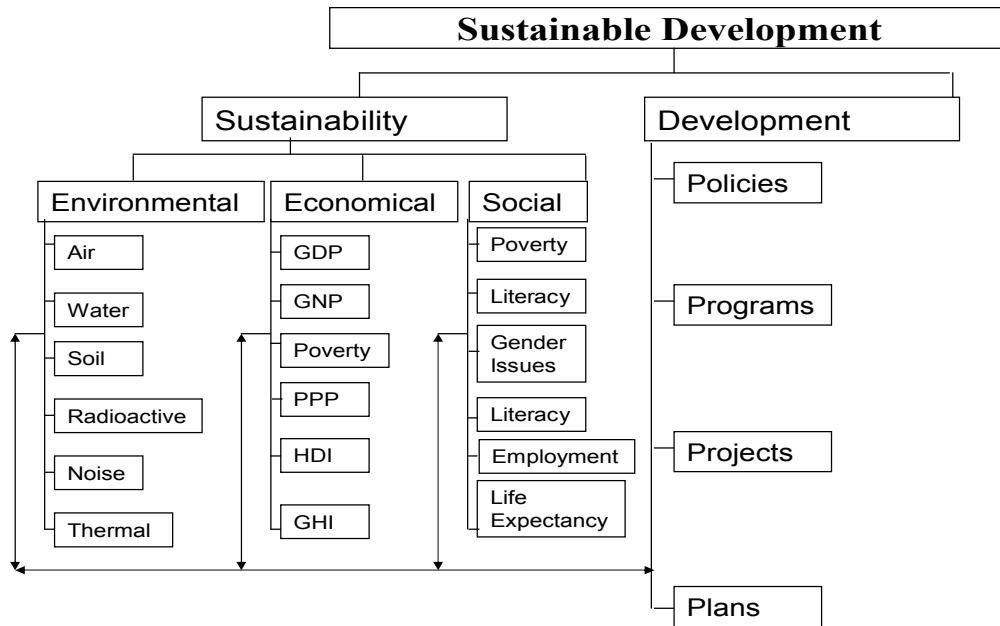
Annexure I



Sustainable Development: The confluence of three occupation

(Source: Wikipedia)

Annex II



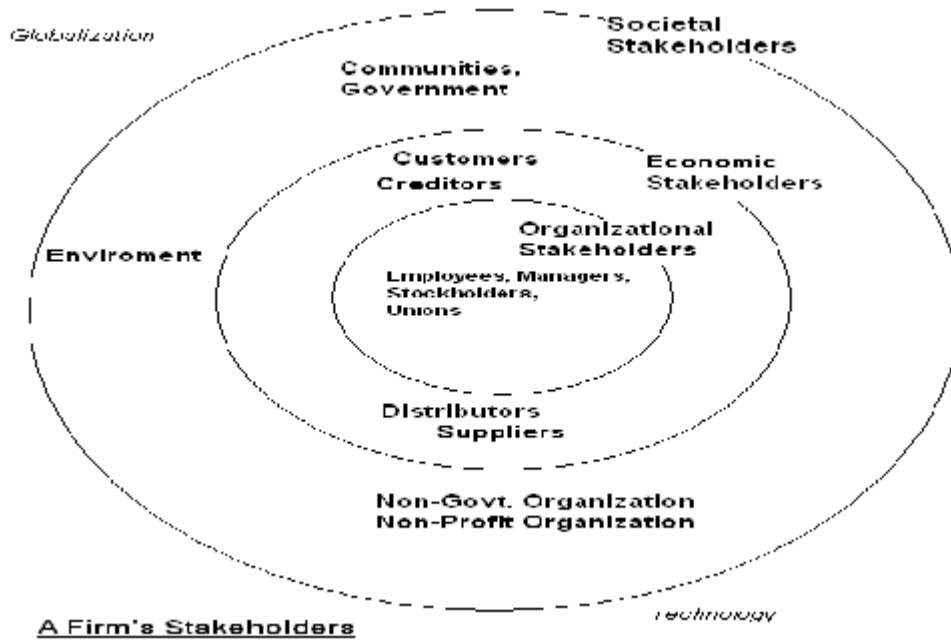
*Sustainable Development: A diagrammatic view (Srivastava & Sahay, 2008)

Annex III



From CSR to Corporate Social Opportunity: 7 Steps, Grayson et al. (2004)

Annexure IV



Three layers of firms stakeholders (Werther et al 2006)