

**Book Review: Reassessing corporate social responsibility for the hyper-global network society: centering communication**

Rahul Mitra

*Organization* 2013 20: 477

DOI: 10.1177/1350508412462952

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://org.sagepub.com/content/20/3/477>

---

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

**Additional services and information for *Organization* can be found at:**

**Email Alerts:** <http://org.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

**Subscriptions:** <http://org.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

**Reprints:** <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

**Permissions:** <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

**Citations:** <http://org.sagepub.com/content/20/3/477.refs.html>

>> [Version of Record](#) - Apr 17, 2013

[What is This?](#)



## Reassessing corporate social responsibility for the hyper-global network society: centering communication

Organization  
20(3) 477–485  
© The Author(s) 2013  
Reprints and permissions:  
sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav  
DOI: 10.1177/1350508412462952  
org.sagepub.com  
The SAGE logo is located at the bottom right of the journal information. It features the word 'SAGE' in a bold, sans-serif font, preceded by a circular emblem containing a stylized 'S'.

*Managing Corporate Social Responsibility: A Communication Approach*, W.T. Coombs and S. J. Holladay.  
Chichester: Wiley, 2011. 200 pp. £23.50. ISBN 9781444336450

*Stakeholders Matter: A New Paradigm for Strategy in Society*, S. Sachs and E. Rühl. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. 296 pp. £55.00. ISBN 9780521196390

*Global Perspectives on Corporate Governance and CSR*, G. Aras and D. Crowther (eds). Farnham: Gower Publishing Ltd, 2009. 364 pp. £70.00. ISBN 9780566088308

*The Handbook of Communication and Corporate Social Responsibility*, O. Ihlen, J. Bartlett and S. May (eds). Chichester: Wiley, 2011. 608 pp. £110.00. ISBN 9781444336344

Every so often, after events such as the Bhopal gas tragedy in the 1980s, or the Enron meltdown in the early 2000s, or the current public reaction against global financial firms, corporate social responsibility (CSR) comes to the fore in public discussion. Although the intermittent attention to the (mis)behavior of corporations and other organizations is welcomed by many audiences including scholars with such interests, the case-specific and often individualistic framing of ‘bad apples’ and ‘good apples’ continues to undermine systemic analysis of the roles of institutions in society-at-large. CSR is often understood in the mainstream as one-off campaigns, incentives and/or philanthropic actions that businesses engage in at their discretion, instead of an underlying philosophy that guides (or ought to guide) their ‘regular’ actions, and the organic interconnections between firms and society are largely unappreciated.

The books reviewed in this essay depart crucially from this trend. Even as they adopt different tones, ranging from academic high theory to practitioner and managerial concerns, they address CSR as everyday principles of business crucial to the firm’s long-term growth story, adopting a holistic view of organizational connectedness with(in) society. The authors and editors of these works largely locate CSR in the relationships that characterize business operations, the processes of change management that all firms must adopt to thrive in the global economy, the legal codes of corporate governance that affect the firm’s very existence, or the communicative practices that constitute the firm, its agents, and its partners. Importantly, all four of these books center communication—either as the effective transmission of CSR related information, or as shaping the relationships among organizational agents, or as the symbolic building blocks that constitute both the firm and what counts as CSR—suggesting that CSR scholars need to take a deeper look at the communicative processes at

stake. In the remainder of this essay, I review these books individually, following which I highlight three aspects of mainstream CSR research that they suggest may be long overdue for a re-haul: specifically, local/global connectedness, dialogue and materiality.

## Four books on CSR

Coombs and Holladay, in their *Managing Corporate Social Responsibility: A Communication Approach*, outline what they term a CSR Process Model, drawing from communication theory—spanning persuasion, media effects, public relations and new media—to help managers better plan and implement their CSR campaigns. The authors are explicit in their ‘practical’ stance toward CSR, even as they aver that a meaningful engagement with CSR involves not cosmetic changes, but rather ‘a *philosophy* and a *process* that anchors practices that can transform organizational behavior’ (emphasis in original, p. 6), so that CSR is rooted in organizational change management. Noting the multiple definitions of CSR in vogue, Coombs and Holladay offer CSR to be ‘*the voluntary actions that a corporation implements as it pursues its mission and fulfils its perceived obligations to stakeholders, including employees, communities, the environment, and society as a whole*’ (pp. 7–8, emphasis in original). Thus, although their definition tends to side with the mainstream understanding of CSR as ‘discretionary’, it also goes beyond one-off campaigns to argue for a strategic fit between a company’s mission and its CSR initiatives. Central here is the rationally informed decision-making that managers must accomplish, to ensure that their companies’ CSR is in line with both the firm and stakeholders’ goals (p. 182). In the first two chapters, the authors briefly discuss recent CSR trends and controversies, outlining their vision of strategic CSR. The following five chapters address each step of the CSR Process Model, namely: scanning and monitoring of stakeholder needs and firm activities; formative research to determine what CSR initiatives should be implemented; the actual creation of the CSR plan; communicating it to stakeholders and evaluations/feedback from stakeholders, which is linked back to step 1 (i.e. scanning and monitoring). In the last chapter, the authors present some overarching concerns and discuss the industrial, cultural and legal limitations of CSR.

There is much for which to commend this book. First, it is eminently readable for managers and laypersons interested in CSR. The book is peppered with real-life case studies, spanning both large and not-so-well-known companies (e.g. Starbucks, Shell, Patagonia, Vodafone, Sephora, IKEA), illustrative graphics and pictures at the start of each chapter and each of the five Process Model chapters contains a critical ‘checklist’ for managers at the end. It is thus a good introduction to the CSR movement, its key motives and drivers, and presents instances of both best practices and cautionary tales for CSR managers. Second, the book does not sacrifice theoretical rigour in order to be practical. It traces the influence of various communication theories and their contemporary versions (e.g. persuasion theory and the diffusion of innovations, to message mapping and echo theory) to ground its prescriptions for CSR managers in sound research. Even as Coombs and Holladay adopt a managerial stance that focuses on the corporate mission (p. 93), they highlight the dangers of not engaging both internal and external stakeholders meaningfully because of power insecurities, corporate vanity or an overwhelming and myopic focus on corporate gain. Dialogue between and among stakeholders, at every step, is underlined by the Process Model. Finally, the authors discuss some key emerging issues for CSR managers, namely, the increasingly complex local/global intersections of both stakeholders’ and firms’ operations and the influence of new technologies such as social media that will profoundly shape—and, arguably, are already shaping—not just CSR initiatives, but broader business-society relations. As they point out, strategic CSR must be ‘anticipatory’ (p. 43): it must anticipate and manage not just intended change,

but also be open to new concerns, environments and dialogues at every step of the CSR Process Model.

The two key assumptions made by Coombs and Holladay—rational decision-making by managers rooted in self-interest, and the corporation-centered view of stakeholder relations—are displaced in the new ‘stakeholder paradigm’ constructed by Sachs and Rühli, in their book *Stakeholders Matter: A New Paradigm for Strategy in Society*. R. Edward Freeman notes, in his foreword to the book, that ‘their proposals do no less than rewrite the contract between business and society’ (p. xv). The stakeholder paradigm assumes a knowledge-intensive network society, where firms and stakeholders are interconnected through complex and strategic flows of resources, whereby a process of mutual value creation occurs. It is not ‘the *invisible* hand of the market that leads to an overall increase in the welfare of society, but the *visible* hand of the firm and the stakeholders’ (emphasis in original, p. 179) at play. The authors ground their proposal in empirical research, both jointly conducted and with other scholars; they draw from case studies of seven large telecom and finance firms, and use other contemporary examples to illustrate their framework (pp. 189–193).

In chapter 1, Sachs and Rühli establish the ‘challenges for a new paradigm in strategic management’, as the chapter is titled, arguing that the dominant economic paradigm is both ill-equipped to address the uncertainties and interconnections of a hyper-global society, as well as potentially unethical, since short term shareholder value creation has eclipsed the social welfare goals underlying economic theory. In Part I (chapters 2–5), the authors engage in a close analysis of mainstream strategy theory [i.e. the industry structure view (ISV) and the resourced-based view (RbV)] and stakeholder approaches (i.e. the stakeholder theory of the firm and stakeholder capitalism), following which they propose their own stakeholder paradigm. They operationalize this paradigm in terms of three main licenses crucial for firms and stakeholders alike: the license to operate, license to innovate and license to compete. In chapters 6–8 of Part II, the book elaborates on each of these licenses, drawing on empirical cases, and finally chapter 9 concludes with a discussion of some key challenges facing widespread adoption of the stakeholder paradigm. The authors detail their case study methodology in the appendix.

Although beyond the scope of this essay to entirely detail Sachs and Rühli’s framework, a synopsis will be useful here. Noting the operations of contemporary firms and stakeholders in a knowledge-intensive network society, they argue that interconnected risks, complex institutional structures and dispersed ownership of resources make the traditional shareholder-as-owner paradigm both unsustainable and inaccurate. Instead, they argue for an expanded understanding of property rights, so that stakeholders are owners of various firm resources, the most important of which is knowledge, and value is created through processes of engagement and mutuality. The firm’s objective then is no longer the maximization of economic value for shareholders, but the processes of mutual value creation by both firms and stakeholders, who bear and provide risks and benefits for firms. This ‘shift away from pure self-interest to mutuality’ (p. 74) essentially ‘enhances benefits and reduces risks for the firm and its stakeholders that are embedded in the network, and therefore leads to superior value’ (p. 75). While drawing from dialogic conceptions of mutuality (e.g. Cissna and Anderson, 1998), the framework acknowledges the possibilities of messy and ‘non-negotiable’ (p. 57) conflicts with/among stakeholders and argues that organizations (i.e. both firms and stakeholders) must constantly strive to earn their licenses to operate, to innovate and to compete within the stakeholder network. Although they emphasize cooperation among actors within and between networks, they include an expanded notion of competition as the benchmarking of mutual value creation, spurring both organizations and networks to reach ‘new’ levels of engagement in an ongoing process of mutuality.

Even as CSR finds scant explicit mention in *Stakeholders Matter*, the proposed paradigm will be clearly beneficial for scholars and practitioners in the field. In probing the social purpose of the firm and its relation to stakeholders, Sachs and Rühli propose a broader notion of CSR tied to issues of governance, that is, how are corporate structures and practices implemented, what are their underlying values and drivers, who implements them and who benefits or is at risk from them (pp. 95–113)? This responsibility is multi-sided, so that even as corporations must seek the legitimacy to operate afforded by stakeholders, like NGOs, government agencies and civic bodies, the same goes for these organizations, whose own stakeholders include the firm. Moreover, in theorizing the licenses to innovate and compete, the book provides a framework to analyse the strategic dimensions of CSR, in terms of the competitive advantages CSR might offer. Eschewing the more common ‘cost benefit’ analysis of mainstream CSR managers (see, for instance, *Managing Corporate Social Responsibility* by Coombs and Holladay), the authors opt for a ‘risk benefit’ framework, since not all risks in a stakeholder network are translatable in financial terms, or are as easily predictable as costs.

For Sachs and Rühli, admitting stakeholder ownership of resources across local/global networks has important implications for corporate governance, which provides a useful transition to Aras and Crowther’s edited *Global Perspectives on Corporate Governance and CSR*. The goal of this volume is to extend the very meaning of ‘good governance’ (p. 37), mapping its intersections with CSR across different cultural locations. The editors define corporate governance as ‘an environment of trust, ethics, moral values and confidence—as a synergetic effort of all the constituents of society—that is, the stakeholders, including the government; the general public etc; professional/service providers—and the corporate sector’ (p. 12). Accordingly, a broader conception of CSR as business principle is proposed, allowing CSR scholars to examine the oft-neglected legal roots of organizational responsibility through corporate governance staples, such as disclosure rules, transparency norms, ownership models, powers and limits of the boards of directors, shareholder investment decisions and leadership roles by managers and founders.

After providing a brief overview of both CSR and corporate governance principles in the first chapter, Aras and Crowther structure the book in three main parts. Part I (chapters 2–5) is concerned with regional perspectives, including Aluchna’s chapter on corporate governance in Western and Eastern European firms, and Bandeira and López-Parra’s chapter on CSR in Latin American countries. Part II (chapters 6–9) addresses local and country-specific issues, in which Raimbaev focuses on small and medium sized companies’ CSR efforts in Uzbekistan, while Sehirli compares two prominent Italian and Turkish firms’ corporate governance. Finally, Part III (chapters 10–12) attempts to link these locational analyses with a form of theoretical ‘prognosis’. There seem to be some inconsistencies in this structure, however, since Ertuna and Ertuna’s chapter on corporate governance in developed versus developing countries is included in Part II (‘local perspectives’), while Daidj’s case study of Japanese *keiretsu* groups through Nissan is in Part I (‘regional perspectives’).

Despite a broad global cast, this volume disappoints on account of its largely bifurcated treatment of CSR and corporate governance. This is especially true in the empirical chapters, where the authors either explicitly focus on CSR (e.g. Bandeira and López-Parra on Latin America, Raimbaev on Uzbekistan) or on corporate governance (e.g. Aluchna on Europe, Charbaji on Lebanon), rarely examining their intersections, as highlighted by Aras and Crowther’s opening chapter. The sole exceptions are Sehirli’s chapter comparing Italian firm Italmobiliare and Turkish firm Saabanci, and Obalola, Omotoso and Adelopo’s work tracing CSR and corporate governance in Africa. Even here, Sehirli largely focuses on corporate governance and relegates CSR to a couple of paragraphs at the end, treating it simplistically as a component of good governance (on par with disclosure and

dispersed ownership). Meanwhile, Obalola et al. mainly describe the trends of CSR and corporate governance in Africa, eschewing a more nuanced analysis of why and how they may intersect. In fact, the only real empirical illustration of these intersections appears in one of the 'theory' chapters of Part III, as Strasser uses the erstwhile Australian James Hardie group to detail his enterprise theory of legal obligation (pp. 255–258). Unfortunately, several of the chapters are also rife with editing mistakes.

Nevertheless, *Global Perspectives* has much to offer in terms of theorizing the governance implications of CSR, and vice versa. It emphasizes the stewardship role of both individual leaders and corporations, providing culturally specific entry points for analysis—for instance, 'substantive organizations' in Latin America that are distinguished from mainstream firms, by their 'primacy of collective action, respect for individual differences, search for balance between men [sic] and organizations, calculated action in value identity' (p. 109; see the chapter by Bandeira and López-Parra). Second, while certain traditional dichotomies are upheld—for example, the issue of whether CSR is discretionary or integral to the firm—several of the chapters call for an expanded view of corporate governance and CSR. Although not quite so radical as Sachs and Rühli, many of the contributors recognize the 'quasi-ownership' (p. 35) of vital organizational resources by stakeholders, the increasing uncertainty of a hyperconnected global economy, as well as the need for a dynamic model of CSR/corporate governance to assess and mitigate these new risks (also see Clarke and Kettner's chapter, calling for a 'redesign' of the corporation along these lines). Thus, Strasser argues that contemporary global organizations are better conceptualized as interconnected enterprises, rather than discrete entities, which would allow for greater clarity when considering complex issues such as bribery by foreign subsidiaries, vast global supply chains and gross negligence by foreign subsidiaries (e.g. liability in the Bhopal tragedy involving Union Carbide/Dow Chemical; see Lekhi, 2012).

Finally, the volume highlights the dilemmas of globalization and 'convergence-in-diversity', where, even as the Anglo-Saxon model of governance is increasingly adopted *de jure* by companies worldwide, researchers need to trace the *de facto* appropriations of this and other mainstream frameworks, with myriad implications for business-society relations (pp. 176–179; see Ertuna and Ertuna's chapter). More critically oriented readers will also want to probe the power relations inherent in such convergence, for instance, noting the frequent silencing of indigenous voices in developing countries (p. 142; see Obalola et al.'s chapter), as well as the potential fetishizing and de-contextualized technologization of local cultures (e.g. 'karma capitalism', p. 182)—re-igniting debates on whether CSR and corporate governance, at least in their mainstream interpretation, constitute a form of neo-imperialism.

An important take-away from this volume for the editors is that the semiotics of corporate reporting—for governance, CSR and/or both—is of vital importance, as firms engage their stakeholders. For them, 'the lack of recognition of the semiotic of corporate reporting has also led to a lack of exploration of the dialectics inherent in such reporting' (p. 326). This realization leads me to the last book reviewed in this essay, Ihlen, Bartlett and May's edited *The Handbook of Communication and Corporate Social Responsibility*, which locates communication at the very heart of CSR, not just in how companies ought to communicate about their existing CSR programs (as in *Managing Corporate Social Responsibility* by Coombs and Holladay), but also how communication actively *constitutes* CSR and organizational ethics (pp. 10–12 of chapter 1 by the editors; also see chapter 24 by Christensen and Cheney). Ihlen, Bartlett and May understand CSR communication 'as the ways that corporations communicate in and about this process; it is the corporate use of symbols and language regarding these matters' (p. 8). At the same time, they do not exclude communication about CSR and corporations' broader responsibilities by



non-corporate actors, such as non-governmental organizations (chapter 22 by Dempsey), civic bodies and other partners (chapter 20 by Bator and Stohl), the media (chapter 21 by Carroll), both existing and potential customers (e.g. chapter 19 by Pomeroy), social media users (chapter 18 by Capriotti) and 'broader' publics (chapter 25 by Leitch and Motion). In fact, a useful way to conceptualize CSR, offered by this volume, is as a 'conversation' (p. 371), one that meanders through topics, spaces and times, with different interactants who find themselves in varying positions of authority to influence the course of the conversation, towards an outcome that shifts over time. While several of the chapters—as well as the other books reviewed here—laud dialogue as the ideal conversational form, this volume reminds us that several *other* forms of talk, perhaps not with the same standards of transparency or commitment to understanding the other, assume relevance, as corporations negotiate their broader responsibilities.

In Part I, the two opening chapters establish the *raison d'être* for the book as well as the peculiar 'paradox' of CSR, so that even as stakeholders expect corporations to be liberal in their CSR communication, doing so often invites accusations of inauthentic and unethical posturing to seduce customers. Part II (chapters 3–8) highlights the interdisciplinary nature of CSR communication, drawing on insights from (sub)fields as varied as management, public relations, organizational communication, marketing, reputation management and rhetorical theory. Part III, divided in two separate sections, adopts a more applied perspective. Thus, the first section (chapters 9–15) addresses mainstream 'concepts and aspects' of CSR communication, such as ethics, risk communication, trust, dialogue, transparency, stakeholders and industrial/regional sectors, while the second section (chapters 16–23) focuses on 'tools and processes' widely regarded as best practices in the CSR context, such as issues management, nonfinancial reports, the Internet and social media, image advertising, global/local partnerships, media relations, non-profit tie-ups and storytelling. Finally, Part IV (chapters 24–28) presents commentaries and critiques of the preceding chapters, from the perspectives of organizational communication, public relations, management studies and discourse studies, both highlighting their contributions to the extant literature and pointing out remaining gaps for future research to address.

The *Handbook* is timely, in that it identifies issues hitherto not explicitly probed in CSR research, relevant to the contemporary hyper-global network society. In his chapter on organizational communication CSR research, May notes that, despite the preponderance of functionalist and critically oriented studies, there remains a paucity of interpretive scholarship that addresses bottom-up meaning-making of CSR and the firm-society relationship, rather than applying elite/a priori definitions. The internal constituents of CSR are often neglected, as has also been pointed out by both *Managing Corporate Social Responsibility* by Coombs and Holladay and *Stakeholders Matter* by Sachs and Rühl, so that a deeper examination is warranted of how and why organizational agents, within corporations and their various stakeholders, make key decisions on CSR, how they lead, how and why they frame the images that they do. Addressing these questions requires a problematization of both 'stakeholders' and 'publics' concepts (p. 288), keeping in mind their disciplinary and socio-historical histories, rather than taking them for granted (see chapter 25 by Leitch and Motion).

Even as CSR is posited as a relationship between firms and the societies they are embedded in/with, we must delve deeper into the practices of communication that shape different actors to understand the nature of this relation. The theme of authenticity is reiterated throughout this volume, as corporations are urged to be genuine in their CSR, yet it becomes clear that technological advances such as social media, greater global interconnectedness across divisions and partners and the need to address multiple publics simultaneously, make authenticity and consistency problematic concepts (see chapters 2, 3, 4, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 18, 19). The same may be said for dialogue and

transparency, widely acknowledged as crucial for meaningful CSR; however, as Nadesan points out in chapter 13, mainstream CSR discourse largely reduces transparency to a neoliberal legal, economic/financial concept, so that firms measure transparency in terms of rules and citations, and are often incentivized to circumvent these same rules, instead of adopting it as an existential principle (p. 270).

Another way of reappraising CSR communication suggested in this volume is by problematizing the ‘corporate citizenship’ literature (e.g. Matten and Crane, 2005), which tends to take corporate personhood as a given. Contrary to this literature, and the recent judgement of the US Supreme Court, however, the contributors to this volume almost uniformly reject corporate personhood, while highlighting the complex communicative ties that constitute organizations (e.g. chapters 13, 24). Corporations are not persons then, but networks of individuals and groups, intricately bound across local/global locations and time zones, in what Bator and Stohl (chapter 20) term a ‘new’ third generation of CSR. Hence, scholars should study the structural holes, porous boundaries and modified forms of social capital that cement these ties. There is much in common here with Sachs and Rühli’s networked economy, noted earlier.

The commentaries in Part IV highlight two broad areas where the *Handbook* does not sufficiently probe: power and culture. Although several chapters, such as those on ethics and power, dialogue and NGOs as communicative actors, peripherally mention power inequities, the volume’s editors (and others) call for a more nuanced treatment of power as everyday and disciplinary (see chapters 24, 27, 28). This requires a disruption of the mainstream dichotomy of the firm as purely economic and society as a civic/civil space, so that corporations are recognized as powerful political instruments, with profound consequences for society as a whole (p. 560). Newly opened spaces such as the Internet and social media are not immune to the workings of disciplinary power, so that even as they allow freer grassroots participation, we need to probe how they simultaneously restrict access and set new inequities (see chapters 18, 26). Finally, although some chapters highlight the local/global intersections of contemporary CSR (e.g. chapter 20), culture—how it shapes CSR norms in different contexts, how culture is itself constituted ‘ground up’ via CSR communication practices—remains little theorized by the contributors.

## **Discussion: broadening local/global connectedness, dialogue, and materiality**

On the whole, the four books reviewed here indicate a new and more complex path for CSR research, requiring a broader and more nuanced understanding of issues the field may have taken for granted. Chief among these are how we understand local/global connectedness, dialogue and materiality; nor are these issues independent of each other, as I note below.

First, consider how these books address the local/global contexts of CSR. Not only have they moved far beyond the traditional North American and European locations that have hitherto defined the field, but they have done so in ways that confront the simultaneously stable and flexible nature of the global political economy. It is no longer enough to merely focus on the global supply chains of multinational corporations based in the West, or even consider how different countries’ cultural norms and legislation on bribery or firm-society relationships affect how these MNCs do business worldwide. Instead, we must consider the intersections between ‘traditional’ and ‘new’, existing and nascent, linkages among various organizations, with civil society bodies such as NGOs and media firms, which shape the licenses to operate, innovate, compete and so on. The hyper-global network society makes corporations stronger and more effective, in terms of the production/distribution/consumption options available, but it also makes them vulnerable to new



stakeholders, legal norms, sociopolitical structures and communicative practices on the ground. Paradoxically, globalization makes local practices more relevant than ever before, as corporations must struggle to address how contextual particularities are tied to one another and to so-called 'global' best practices. Addressing and appropriating local cultures bring the opportunities of achieving strategic 'buy-in', but may also invite charges of fetishizing local cultures and absorbing indigenous traditions into a faceless global void. Negotiating these dilemmas calls for dialogic engagement, and understanding not just the symbolic implications of CSR, but also its material consequences on the ground.

Second, despite their emphasis on dialogue, the books repeatedly highlight how its mainstream conception may be insufficient to deal with the challenges of the hyper-global network society. Although dialogue normally assumes a commitment to authentic engagement, respect for the other and abiding by the ensuing decisions (Anderson et al., 2004), the books are replete with examples where CSR dialogue turns out to be half-hearted, rigged from the start in favour of powerful corporations, disadvantaging subaltern actors who lack access or established means of self-presentation, resulting in piecemeal or unjust outcomes. Recently, dialogue scholars have called for a more explicit engagement with power relations (Hammond et al., 2003), even arguing for a more expanded perspective that centers agonistic means, such as protests, demonstrations and violence, which might force powerful corporate agents to agree to a more equitable dialogue (Ganesh and Zoller, 2012). Such a broader view of dialogue privileges conflict, rather than consensus, so that the goal is to produce a pragmatic rather than utopian 'win-win' outcome.

For instance, even as Sachs and Rühli highlight mutuality for firm/stakeholder value creation, they take both competition *and* cooperation—rather than just the latter—as crucial for the process. Moreover, it allows us to conceptualize the modern corporation better as a political entity, one that is embedded in often antagonistic stakeholder networks, where it lacks complete control of the CSR message it seeks to craft and transmit, and where local/global governance norms show 'convergence-in-diversity' rather than being monolithic. As we start considering the impact of new organizational forms that address these contemporary concerns, such as the benefit corporation that explicitly adopts a multi-stakeholder, extra-fiduciary mission (Reiser, 2011), it stands to reason that expanded notions of dialogue and power influence issues management and 'authenticity' with different stakeholders. This allows us to reassess the use of CSR as 'aspirational talk' and the emphasis of nonfinancial reports on the as-yet-unaccomplished future (see chapters 2, 11, 19, 24, 26 of the *Handbook*) without dismissing these as unethical hypocrisy right away.

Finally, there is the issue of materiality, on which the books reviewed here remain largely silent, but that is never very far away in the background. Sachs and Rühli aver that stakeholders 'matter', but how exactly? Is their impact to be understood only in terms of their symbolic dimensions? But if the knowledge resources they so emphasize is linked to the 'being' of organizations and organizational agents, then we may not easily discount the physical and experiential components of such being. Similarly, even as Coombs and Holladay stress that CSR 'matters' because it is a complex process of change management, it forces us to also consider the material conditions and implications of such change. Taking the all-too-(in)famous Union Carbide/Dow Chemical case in Bhopal, it is evident that the lack of adequate CSR, in terms of safety regulations and compensation for the victims, has had very 'material' consequences for those impacted, ranging from physical injury to economic loss and environmental damage (Lekhi, 2012). Ashcraft et al. (2009) note that communication involves both the symbolic and material, in an ongoing dialectic, so that even as the books reviewed here underscore the role of communication, future CSR research will be well-served to probe the interconnections of place/site, object/resource and body as material factors, along with the symbolic dimensions that shape CSR practices on the ground. Expanded notions of CSR

dialogue depend crucially on such interconnections, in the physical dimensions and characteristics of the dialogic site available or the online resources (e.g. speed of the available Internet connection, money to afford the Internet connection) to attain dialogue in social media or in the raced/sexed bodies that are deemed eligible to enter into dialogue with more powerful others.

To conclude, the books reviewed in this essay set an intriguing agenda for the future of CSR scholarship in the contemporary hyper-global network economy. They are likely to appeal to a wide variety of academic and practitioner readers interested not just in mainstream CSR, but also deeper business-society relations, strategy and change management, corporate governance, organizational and management communication, public relations and organization studies.

## References

- Anderson, R., Baxter, L. A. and Cissna, K.N., eds (2004) *Dialogue: Theorizing Difference in Communication Studies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Ashcraft, K. L., Kuhn, T. R. and Cooren, F. (2009) 'Constitutional Amendments: "Materializing" Organizational Communication', *The Academy of Management Annals* 3: 1–64.
- Cissna, K. N. and Anderson, R. (1998) 'Theorizing About Dialogic Moments: The Buber-Rogers Position and Postmodern Themes', *Communication Theory* 8: 63–104.
- Ganesh, S. and Zoller, H. M. (2012) 'Dialogue, Activism, and Democratic Social Change', *Communication Theory* 22: 66–91.
- Hammond, C., Anderson, R. and Cissna, K. (2003) 'The Problematics of Dialogue and Power', *Communication Yearbook* 27: 125–57.
- Lekhi, R. (2012) 'Bhopal Victims Hold Own Olympics to Protest Dow', *Associated Press*. Retrieved from <http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5hYq3YY5asyuj2ynggFV53evVBcyQ?docId=ff6f32879ab74796ab312c55f3d2832b>
- Matten, D. and Crane, A. (2005) 'Corporate Citizenship: Toward an Extended Theoretical Conceptualization', *The Academy of Management Review* 30: 166–79.
- Reiser, D. B. (2011) 'Benefit Corporations—A Sustainable Form of Organization?', *Wake Forest Law Review* 46: 591–625.

**Rahul Mitra**

Brian Lamb School of Communication, Purdue University