

Preface

Criticisms of the notion that companies should live up to and act in accordance with their social responsibilities, are probably as old as the idea itself. For a long time, economists in particular have fiercely argued against the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and warned that it would endanger the capitalist market system as a whole. Considering this hostile stance taken by some scholars in Germany as well as internationally, it is quite astonishing how business ethics in general and CSR in particular have managed to enter mainstream management research. Compared to international developments in business ethics, the German discussion has mainly occupied itself with normative questions such as whether and how companies could be expected to adhere to certain ethical standards, or whether business administration as an academic discipline should consider such questions at all. Conversely, descriptive research questions have not been that popular in the past and have only slowly started to form a legitimate part of business ethics and CSR research in Germany.

I have for a long time been very impressed by the sophisticated normative business ethics theories developed in continuation of the long-standing German tradition of ethical reasoning in philosophy, economics and business administration. Nonetheless, descriptive analysis is very important for normative theories, even and especially in the case of ethics (without necessarily being instrumental): normative theory in certain cases needs to know how things *actually work*, before it can determine how things *ought to work*. This doctoral thesis intends to contribute to an understanding of how CSR works. It does so by starting out with a very simple question (which, alas, does not stay that simple): Is there a business case for CSR? After writing this book, I wish I could say: CSR simply pays! As one might guess, it is not that easy. On the one hand, this is bad news because, if the story were that simple, there would be no reason to worry as companies, profit-seeking as they are, would just act in line with societal expectations. On the other hand, this is good news, as it leaves room for many more books and articles within this very exciting field of positive research.

This monograph was accepted as a doctoral thesis by the Munich School of Management at the Ludwig-Maximilians-University. It came into being during my work

as a research and teaching assistant at the Institute of Operations Management and Managerial Accounting (IPC). I owe a great deal to many people at the institute who provided the perfect environment for me to start, advance and complete this project. First and foremost, I would like to express my deep gratitude to and respect for my doctoral supervisor Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. Hans-Ulrich Küpper, who guided me through the sometimes very demanding process of overseeing a project such as this. He was always willing to discuss critically my thoughts at any stage of development, without curtailing too much my freedom to follow my personal preferences. His enthusiasm for ethical reasoning, his experience and his support, especially during the more critical periods, were of immense value to me. Beyond Prof. Küpper's professional supervision, he familiarised me with many academic and personal virtues, mostly through actions rather than words. This also applies to our research seminars (including some very fine skiing and hiking trips), which formed the ideal setting for the discussion of all our work in progress. Professionally and personally, I have benefited tremendously from my years at the IPC.

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Philipp Schreck

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