

## A Summary Review of the Leading Information Technology Companies' Approaches to Corporate Social Responsibility

Petter Jon\*, Daphne Comfort

Department of School of Business, University of Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, UK

### ABSTRACT

The emergence of digital technologies is seen to be vitally important in driving future economic development, but these technologies may have damaging implications for society. This potential contradiction begs the question of how leading information technology companies, that play an important role in developing, disseminating, promoting, and facilitating the digital technologies, address social responsibility. The aim of this summary review is to shed some light on this question by reviewing how the leading information technology countries publicly approach corporate social responsibility.

**Keywords:** Corporate social responsibility; Digital technologies; Information technology companies; Environmental sustainability; Economic growth

### INTRODUCTION

The continuing emergence of digital technologies will have a profound range of impacts for the economy and society. For example, argued 'digital innovation and the rapid adoption of new technologies are changing everything-the way people work, how they live and what the future will look like [1]. On the one hand, the digital technologies will drive future economic growth, and on the other hand, they may have profound, and potentially damaging, implications for society. This potential contradiction begs the question of how the major information technology companies, that play an important role in developing, disseminating, promoting, and facilitating, the digital technologies, address their social responsibilities.

This summary review looks to shed some light on this question by reviewing how the leading information technology companies, publicly address corporate social responsibility. The review draws its information from the corporate websites of a number of the leading information technology companies, namely, Microsoft, IBM, Oracle, Accenture, Hewlett Packard Enterprise, SAP, Tata Consultancy Services, Capgemini, and Infosys, and employs selective quotations from their most recent corporate social responsibility reports on these websites, in the belief that this approach helps to convey corporate authenticity.

### CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Corporate social responsibility is concerned with the integration of environmental, social, economic, considerations into business strategies and practices, but there is no agreed definition. Over twenty years ago, suggested 'corporate social responsibility associations reflect the organisation's status and activities with respect to its perceived societal obligations' [2]. More recently, argued 'we conceive corporate social responsibility as a responsibility towards human development in two complementary ways: (a) a holistic responsibility shared by companies together with other actors to safeguard humanity and (b) a direct liability of each company for its impact on stakeholders' capabilities'[3].

The conventional business case for corporate social responsibility is seen to focus on a wide range of potential benefits. These include improved financial performance and profitability; reduced operating costs; long-term sustainability for companies and their employees; increased staff commitment and involvement; enhanced capacity to innovate; good relations with government and communities; better risk and crisis management; enhanced reputation and brand value; and the development of closer links with customers and greater awareness of their needs. However, there are those who would champion the case against companies integrating corporate

**Correspondence to:** Peter Jones, Department of School of Business, University of Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, UK, E-mail: jons@glos.ac.uk

**Received:** April 26, 2021; **Accepted:** May 11, 2021; **Published:** May 18, 2021

**Citation:** Jones P, Comfort D (2021) A Summary Review of the Leading Information Technology Companies' Approaches to Corporate Social Responsibility. J Inform Tech Softw Eng.11:257.

**Copyright:** © Jones P, et al. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

social responsibility into their core business. For example, argued that corporate social responsibility is too narrow to engage management attention, too broad and unquantifiable to be taken seriously by the financial community, and just woolly enough to be exploited by charlatans and opportunists' [4].

### Corporate social responsibility agendas

The leading information technology companies emphasized that corporate social responsibility was embedded into their corporate culture and integrated across the whole span of their business activities, and that it was also crucially important in generating business benefits and creating shareholder value. In her 'Message from Our Chief Executive Officer', which provided the foreword for Oracle's 'Corporate Citizenship Report', Sapra Catz, claimed 'good corporate citizenship means being intentional and thoughtful about the value we generate as a company, not only for our shareholders, but also for our people, our planet and future generations' and that 'we are proud to leverage our greatest assets our technology and our people to change lives around the world' [5]. Reported that the company's massive global spending power 'presents an opportunity to promote our company's values and help drive progress in environmental and social responsibility throughout our supply chain' [6].

In evidencing such commitments, the leading information technology companies looked to address a variety of corporate social responsibility agendas, including, environmental sustainability; human rights; responsible sourcing; employees well-being, inclusion and diversity, privacy and cyber security, the digital divide, and the COVID-19 pandemic. In focusing on environmental sustainability, the information technology companies identified several challenges, but climate change was the dominant issue. For example, argued 'climate change increasingly is affecting living and working conditions around the world and now is the time to act [1]. We are seeing impacts on the environment, our clients, our business, our communities and our people and are committed to playing a leading role in the transition to a low-carbon economy through our actions.' reported on a range of its activities, including reductions in carbon dioxide emissions, energy conservation, and a greater focus on renewable electricity [6].

A corporate commitment to human rights was explicitly emphasised by several of the information technology companies. for example, claimed 'we aim to respect human rights in the way we do business and to advance those rights with the power of technology', that the company 'aspires to leadership in business and human rights and to serve as a catalyst for others in the technology sector and beyond', and that 'a focus on human rights helps our employees to make good decisions and ethical choices, and builds trust with our customers and partners' [7]. Asserted its beliefs that 'the basic freedoms and standards of treatment to which all people are entitled are universal' and 'upholding these rights is fundamental to our values' [8].

The leading information technology companies reported that their approach to their supply chains offered an important opportunity to pursue progress in pursuing a range of corporate

social responsibility goals. In addressing 'responsible sourcing', for example, claimed, 'we work to ensure that our suppliers operate in a socially, environmentally, legally and ethically responsible manner' [7]. Reported 'a significant part of our social and environmental impact is delivered through our supply chain' and that the company worked 'to minimize any negative impacts associated with our supply chain' [9]. In outlining its approach to 'sustainable procurement', emphasised that it profiled the environmental impacts of its suppliers' operations, products and services [10].

The companies' relationships with their employees was reported as a major feature of their approach to social responsibility. Under the banner, 'Investing in People', claimed 'our people are our greatest asset', 'we are committed to being unconditionally inclusive to capture the ideas and perspectives that fuel innovation and enable our workforce, customers and communities to succeed in the digital age', and that 'when our team members succeed, our company thrives making employee engagement a priority' [8]. Rajesh Gopinathan, Tata Consultancy Services' Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director, for example, claimed that 'our core competence is our ability, to attract, train, retain and engage the best talent across the world' [11].

The increasingly high profile issues of privacy and cyber security featured in many of the leading information technology companies' corporate social responsibility reports. for example, emphasised 'we recognize privacy as a fundamental human right', claimed, 'we work to preserve our customers' ability to control their data', reported that 'we're working to protect our customers by analysing more than 6.5 trillion signals each day, processing 450 billion authentications and scanning 400 billion emails for malware and phishing each month' [7]. Emphasised 'as the possibilities of data continue to grow, so do the threats against its security', and reported 'we defend against cybercrime at every step of our value chain' [8].

In focusing on the digital divide, argued 'as a global technology company we believe we have a responsibility and a great opportunity to help close the broad band gap that exists in the US and across the globe' [7]. Reported 'our programme covers a range of initiatives that take a progressive approach to digital inclusion', and that it was 'leveraging our innovation and technology capabilities to develop solutions to address society's biggest challenges' [10]. More specifically, outlined its Adult Literacy Programme, which focuses upon its 3R's, namely 'Reading, wRiting, and arithmetic', first launched in 2000, with the 'intent of making the semi-literate and illiterate masses of India functionally literate in their native language' [11].

The information technology companies also outlined their contributions to tackling the COVID-19 pandemic. For example reported that the company had 'shared resources, formed alliances and deployed solutions to meet the complex urgent challenges of COVID-19' [6]. In illustrating this contribution IBM report on its joint work with the US Government, industry and academics to provide free access to supercomputing capacity in support of COVID-19 research and on how it shared its experience and resources to help millions of school children with remote learning. In a similar vein, reported 'working with

various governments, regulatory and travel authorities and medical experts on evolving advisories and guidelines', as well as its work 'to secure the financial and operational resilience of the company' [12].

## CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

The leading information technology companies report positively on their commitments to corporate social responsibility, and they look to evidence their commitments in a variety of ways, but three wider sets of issues merit reflection and discussion. Firstly, there is an issue about the tension between corporate social responsibility and economic growth. Within the information technology companies' commitment to corporate social responsibility there is a common emphasis on environmental sustainability, and here the underlying goal might be to protect and maintain environmental and ecological resources for future generations. However, many of the companies' commitments to corporate social responsibility are also seen to be important in driving and facilitating economic growth, which depends, in part, on the continuing exploitation of scarce natural resources. As such the leading information technology companies might be seen to pursuing two contradictory sets of goals under the common banner of corporate social responsibility.

Secondly, there are issues about the responsible use of technology. Several of the leading information technology companies emphasised their responsible use of technology and looked to evidence the exercise of that responsibility as a force for good, as an integral part of their commitment to corporate social responsibility. However, there are questions about whose interests are best served by these commitments. For example, argued that a potentially important contradiction, namely 'whether the business enterprise can do well for society as well as make profits for itself', has received limited attention in the academic literature [13]. More critically, argued that 'corporate social responsibility represents a further embedding of capitalist social relations and a deeper opening up of social life to the dictates of the marketplace' [14].

Thirdly, at the time of writing, the COVID-19 pandemic, poses a major challenge for the information communication technology companies. On the one hand, for example, have suggested that digital technologies can contribute to traditional public health strategies in the monitoring, surveillance, detection, and prevention of COVID-19 and in mitigating its impact [15-17].

## CONCLUSION

On the other hand, COVID-19 has exposed some of the fragilities at the boundaries between people and nature and

highlighted the environmental limits that ultimately circumscribe human activities, and it may pose wider opportunities and challenges for approaches to corporate social responsibility. More specifically, the pandemic might be seen to have opened a window on what some advocates see as a more sustainable world. For example, argued 'while it may seem fanciful and insolent, Covid-19 is an opportunity to reduce over the longer term the prevalence of lifestyle premised on large volumes of energy and material throughput'.

## REFERENCES

1. Building a Future of Shared Success. Accenture. 2020.
2. Brown TJ, Dacin PA. The company and the product: Corporate associations and consumer product responses. *Journal of marketing*. 1997;61(1):68-84.
3. Renouard C, Ezvan C. Corporate social responsibility towards human development: A capabilities framework. *Business Ethics: A European Review*. 2018;27(2):144-155.
4. Kitchin T. Corporate social responsibility: A brand explanation. *Journal of Brand Management*. 2003;10(4):312-326.
5. Our commitment to India. Corporate Citizenship Report-Oracle India. 2021.
6. IBM and Good Tech: Modeling responsible stewardship in the digital age. IBM. 2020.
7. Corporate Social Responsibility Report. Microsoft. 2019.
8. 2019 Living Progress Report. Hewlett Packard Enterprise. 2020.
9. 2019 Integrated Report. SAP. 2019.
10. Group Environmental Sustainability Report 2019/20. Capgemini. 2020.
11. Corporate Sustainability Report. Tata Consultancy Services. 2020.
12. Resilient and Responsible-That's Live Enterprise. Infosys. 2020.
13. Hanlon G, Fleming PP. Updating the critical perspective on corporate social responsibility. *Sociology Compass*. 2009;3(6):937-948.
14. Hanlon G. Rethinking corporate social responsibility and the role of the firm-On the denial of politics. In *The Oxford handbook of corporate social responsibility*. 2008.
15. Crane A, Williams AM, Matten D, Moon J, Siegel DS. *The Oxford Handbook of Corporate Social Responsibility*. Oxford University Press. 2009.
16. Ting DS, Carin L, Dzau V, Wong TY. Digital technology and COVID-19. *Nature medicine*. 2020;26(4):459-61.
17. Cohen MJ. Does the COVID-19 outbreak mark the onset of a sustainable consumption transition? *Sustainability: Science Practice and Policy*. 2020;16(3):1-3.