

Social Responsibility: A Short History

Nissan Limor¹

Although the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become very commonly used, its meaning is ambiguous in the way it is exercised and channeled through various avenues. The ambiguity of the concept testifies to the fact it is dynamic and still developing, but also reflects disappointment in the ways that it is put in practice. As such, it is hardly surprising that many express a desire to enact enforcement programs in order to guarantee proper application of the ideals upon which it is based. The concept of social responsibility of business arouses various dilemmas which derive from the changing meanings given to this concept in different places and periods, from the past to our present time.

The inability of governments to respond to the varied needs of individuals, the lack of formal regulations, the accumulation of wealth by businesses, the existence of social gaps, the emergence of civil society, the processes of the globalization and development of concepts as human and citizen rights, sustainability, social responsibility, and public responsibility – all these not only accentuate the dilemmas, but are also a major force that exerts pressure to find proper answers.

The search for these answers requires a process in which partners from all sectors should take part. The present financial crisis pointed out the need for this cooperation in order to adopt a proper definition in every society, based on the social, economic and political culture in every country and meeting both local and global needs. Here lies the key to the definition of the CSR for the benefit of every society.

1 The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Paul Baerwald School of Social Work and Social Welfare, Joseph J. Schwartz M.A. Program in Management of Nonprofit and Community Organizations.