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Article:

Annals in Social Responsibility:

Bringing New Perspectives to the Study of Social Responsibility

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Annals in Social Responsibility:

Bringing New Perspectives to the Study of Social Responsibility

With the first issue of *Annals in Social Responsibility* we are beginning a journey of scholarship that we hope will lead to a more deliberative, nuanced and substantively scientific examination of the role of social responsibility across a range of disciplines, topics and applications. No one doubts the value and importance of the study of social issues for society at large. However, despite the significance of the topic there exists no single publication outlet where scholars across disciplines can come together and address the broad range of issues that encompass the topics one normally associates with the study of socially responsible behaviour in all its forms. While other journals publish research on social responsibility, they do so secondarily – as the origins of these journals is based on broader disciplinary logics (e.g., management, sociology, economics, psychology, etc.) or with an eye on topics that arose because of their relevance in the past (e.g., business ethics, government/business relations, public policy, development and so on). *Annals in Social Responsibility* is an attempt to jettison this baggage and provide an outlet that gives scholars the opportunity to focus on the core topic of social responsibility alone while providing readers with a single source of work in the area.

What is Social Responsibility?

To start a journal with "Social Responsibility" in the title it is no doubt appropriate to have a definition of what that term means. Looking into the literature there are many different meanings of the term "social responsibility", with most being specific to the focal application to which it is being applied. For

our purposes a general definition is best, as it is less restrictive. Social responsibility has two parts.

The first is the "social", which relates to those components that form part of the many forms of society in which individuals reside. When we speak of society in this sense, we are not restricting individuals to 'a' society but explicitly recognizing that people belong to many societies, each of which has some differential value to them. These societies will overlap and/or interact, even if only through the vehicle of that one individual. The social component of "social responsibility" implies that what matters to the scholarship that we seek to publish is that it addresses issues that emphasize the impact that an individual, group or organisation has on other individuals, groups and organisations, either within a single society or across societies through their interactions. These influences can be via individual or group behaviour at the micro level through to macro level structuring of governance rules, laws, and norms of social behaviour and interactions.

The second component of the definition is "responsibility". Again there are many definitions of responsibility; but for us the operative definition that matters has two components. The first of these is the obligation to behave 'correctly' towards another (individual, group, organisation, etc.); where 'correctly' is defined with respect to the norms/obligations/laws/morality of society. What is or is not 'correct' being defined by the obligations one has as a member of a society. The second component of responsibility is choice; the fact that actions reflect what the individual, group or organization does of their own volition; i.e., the responsibility that they take on.

Generating New Perspectives

Given our definition of social responsibility we can see a broad and almost limitless set of topics that can be addressed, ranging from studies of individual behaviour and choice, through to research on social norms and group behaviours, and all the way to legal and institutional studies. However, our desire is not to repeat work that is best published in psychology, sociology, economics or law journals. These journals have strong historic theoretical and empirical traditions that have already been applied to many issues that fit our definition of social responsibility. While we need more of this type of work, it is not clear that working within these disciplinary traditions will achieve the type of breakthroughs that we hope *Annals in Social Responsibility* will trigger. They are part of the conversation we need to have but may not be the solution to the problems we are seeking to address.

For us, the substantive issues that matter may require new de novo theorizing and, potentially, reliance on methodological approaches yet to be discovered. Note that this is more than yet another call for inter-disciplinary or cross-disciplinary research or the application of mixed empirical methods. While such scholarship can be valuable, it invariably starts from existing theoretical and empirical perspectives that arose to address specific phenomena that may have had nothing to do with social responsibility in the first place.

We seek is to address research questions that impact on our understanding of the components of, and vectors for, social responsibility (and irresponsibility). Hence, we are interested in those phenomena that reflect societal interaction so that we can understand more effectively what leads to better or worse collective outcomes. While we are concerned with phenomena,

we are not advocating for an inductive grounded theory approach to generating

theory (although we don't excluded it). Induction can provide a scientific

beginning to a conversation, but thinking must go beyond theory to critical

testing so as to parse out the factors most relevant to a parsimonious theory. In

this sense, our approach is distinctly evidence based. So while ideas are good,

ideas supported with evidence are better.

Achieving Breakthrough: Scientific Venture Capital

The prior discussion is conceptually noble, but is it practical? For us, *Annals in*

Social Responsibility is akin to scientific open innovation. We seek not just

expertise from those interested in "social responsibility" but those interested in

things "social" and things "responsible", independently. We will be working

toward an approach that is very much an interactive workshop driven mode of

scholarly interaction that will use symposia and other interactive vehicles for

generating mixtures of scholarship focused on the examination of specific

phenomena falling into the arena of social responsibility.

      The value of this approach is two-fold. Such interactions increase the

quality of 'normal' science; in that, traditional research will, hopefully, be

improved via contestation by scholars from other disciplinary, theoretical and

empirical traditions. Second, our approach to phenomena-based interactions

will be different in that we are not just seeking a confluence of ideas but working

to seek solutions via an intensive "lead user" approach. The lead user logic

focuses on the perspectives, knowledge and skills needed to address a problem.

Hence, one might bring into the conversation those with skills never applied to

the problem at hand but whose abilities have pertinence to aspects of the

problem. What matters in the interaction is not that the individuals are

necessarily natively interested in the phenomena, but that they have

perspectives and approaches that can be useful for addressing the phenomena.

In working to achieve the aim of more disruptive but effective scholarship

our form of publication is important. We are an annual publication. This gives

us the freedom to focus on the longer term, as we are not seeking to simply fill up

a quarterly or monthly publication with articles written independently. Second,

we operate in a manner that does not rely simply on the processing of papers via

normal submission routes. Hence, we are interested in working with authors to

put together work that has a chance of making a difference and articles that can

be read coherently together.

The Science of Social Responsibility: What We Seek?

As noted, the topics that fit within out mission are quite broad. One can think of

submitting work on human rights, ethical consumption, environmental planning,

government regulations, corporate social responsibility, worker rights, gender

policies, racism, political lobbying and so on. The opportunities in regard to

phenomena are endless and we do not seek to exclude any topic area that fits

into our broad definition of "social responsibility". However, it is important that

authors go beyond singular perspectives that fall into more traditional

theoretical and empirical approaches and our reviewer selection policy ensures

that articles that speak to only one disciplinary audience will struggle to get

published.

From a methodological perspective we also seek innovation, as one of the

major constraints on what we know is the depth of our evidence. For example,

the vast majority of papers that pertain to social responsibility are conceptual. Those that try to bring evidence to bear are invariably qualitative, relying on case studies or interview data. Those that are quantitative historically used survey approaches, while panel data studies are more prevalent today. Few, if any, apply psychological experiments and even fewer utilise behavioural economics methods. Similarly, while social responsibility is a multi-level phenomenon – e.g., managers making decisions based upon the norms of the corporation within which they work that is embedded with the national society within which they live and operate – our approaches fail to capture the complexity of these interactions across levels.

If we are going to bring new insights to the area looking at the same issues with the same methods is unlikely to prove effective. In this sense, our venture capital logic is appropriate for an endeavour like *Annals in Social Responsibility*. We are willing to allow scholarship to take risks and we will share that risk by giving authors a vehicle to have their voice heard. Many journals say that they want new ideas and new methods. Few achieve this because their publication process is based on incremental normal science. As a new entrepreneurial journal we need to be anything but normal!

Join the Journey

Issue 1 is just the beginning of the journey and we encourage scholars to join us on that journey. The journal will evolve and there will be changes in almost every issue over the next few years. This is us "walking the walk" to go with our having "talked the talk" of encouraging open innovation and an entrepreneurial approach to the scholarship and publication process.