

# The journey from Corporate Social Responsibility to Corporate Social Innovation: The Whys and the Hows

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## Abstract.

On the path to industrialization, companies sought to create value for customers, shareholders, and owners. The relentless pursuit of profitability violated the rights of some community members and provoked several protests against the violation of human rights and negligence of environmental issues. Companies first understood these problems and accepted the demands of stakeholders. However, following the closure of many businesses that were not socially responsible, companies decided to apply general principles to create a good social image. Therefore, they stopped the protests against them by preventing the emergence of social problems and severe consequences of companies' actions towards society and nature. These events led to the introduction of the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR). Accordingly, companies attempted to take action and create a good social image of themselves by spending some money before being obliged by the law and society to deal with the negative social and environmental consequences of their activities. The problem was that companies spent only part of their profits on projects that they thought would receive the most significant social feedback. However, in traditional charitable CSR efforts, it is often impossible to undertake an activity and measure its tangible social outcomes in the long run. Companies must pursue a strategic concept that produces sustainable social changes by engaging different company segments and stakeholders. This concept is called corporate social innovation (CSI). This study defined the concept of CSR and showed how the definitions and concepts and corporate trends have shifted from CSR to CSI over the course of time.

**Keywords.** Social Innovation, Corporate Social Responsibility, Corporate Social Innovation, Business Sustainability, Social Responsibility

## 1. introduction

Human activities have always been intertwined with social relations. Although human beings possess different personality traits (e.g., insatiable desire for the position of power), there have always been people who have obliged themselves to observe ethical rules and accept social responsibilities. According to the Hippocratic Oath, the highest ethical principle is not to knowingly harm others. Peter Drucker considers this principle a fundamental principle of ethics and the basis of public responsibility [1]. Business ethics is not different from other types of ethics [2].

Applying ethical standards in business led to the development of new concepts in the business literature. The result was the initiation of several social changes that initially required businesses to accept a key concept called social responsibility. Racism, child labor, and enslaved people at work led to several protests. After that, immoral businesses were boycotted by society, and all businesses were obliged to accept the principles defined by society.

Consequently, businesses tried to take action and fulfil their social responsibilities in order to keep the community and stakeholders satisfied and prevent any damage to their credibility and social image. Here, the definition of social responsibility became more critical, and businesses attempted to undertake any activity that promotes their social image and prevents the emergence of social problems. However, lack of a clear long-term goal, lack of attention to the target community, and lack of information about delivering provided products or services through CSR made many of these efforts ineffective and unmeasurable. The concept of corporate social innovation (CSI) was later introduced to help companies establish strategic goals, measure the social outcomes of their efforts, and involve the target community in social benefits issues. This study explained how and why companies had shifted their efforts from CSR to CSI over time.

## **2. Corporate social responsibility**

As mentioned earlier, the concept of CSR was introduced after companies made efforts to obey ethical rules in order to observe the rights of stakeholders and apply social principles. This section provides a history of social responsibility, presents various definitions of social responsibility, and discusses the development of this concept and its definitions over time.

*2.1 History of CSR.* The issue of ethics was first discussed in the business literature more than seven decades ago. The first principles of social responsibility were introduced in 1950. The social responsibility literature was developed in the following decades, and its definitions and dimensions were further examined [3]. The term CSR was first coined in 1953 by Howard Bowen, an economist known as the father of corporate social responsibility. Bowen argued that CSR is a global business norm in the 21st century. He encouraged scholars to examine further the effectiveness of CSR and the use of CSR as a form of advertising or marketing tool.

Although the general public has paid more attention to the phenomenon of CSR in recent years, research reveals evidence of social concerns for businesses, especially during the Industrial Revolution. From the mid to late 1800s, some concerns and criticisms were expressed in society about the welfare and productivity of workers, the system of emerging factories, conditions of labor, and the employment of women and children. Employment conditions and practices exacerbate social problems such as poverty and labor unrest. Industrial improvements and welfare movements were created as a combination of philanthropic and business measures. With the rise of the philanthropic movement, people like Andrew Carnegie donated a large portion of their wealth to expand education and research activities [4].

The widespread approval of CSR began in the 1990s. In 1991, Dr. Wood, a professor at the University of Pittsburgh, published an article on CSR revision. In this research, she developed and improved early CSR models by providing a framework for evaluating the impacts and results of CSR programs. Several similar articles were after that published by other researchers [5]. By the early 2000s, CSR became an essential strategy for many organizations, as several multimillion-dollar companies (e.g., Coca-Cola, Walt Disney, Wells Fargo, and Pfizer) incorporated this concept into their business processes [6]. After introducing the concept of corporate social responsibility, CSR was widely used in the accounting and management literature. Over the last decade, companies have included ethical principles in their managerial decisions to fulfill their social responsibilities better. The following definitions of CSR were extracted from the research literature to enhance our understanding of this crucial concept.

*2.2 Definitions of CSR.* Scholars have offered several definitions for corporate social responsibility. This concept has constantly been evolving, and there is no unique definition of CSR [7]. This is due to the

differences in the views and culture of scholars who have offered these definitions. For example, CSR refers to the production of safe and quality products for Chinese consumers, while in South Africa, CSR emphasizes the fulfillment of social needs such as healthcare and education. Table 1 presents some of the essential definitions of CSR in order of their publication date.

Table 1 Definitions of CSR

<b>Year of publication</b>	<b>Author(s)</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Main themes</b>
1953	Hwang and Chung (2018) (quoted from Bonik (1953)) [8]	Commitments of businesses and individuals to promote policies, actions, and decisions, which are in line with community goals and values.	Creating social value
1975	Davis and Blomstrom [9]	Commitment of management to take necessary actions to increase corporate benefits and promote the welfare of community members.	Impact of management on social responsibility
1986	Jones [10]	A company's commitments to community members go beyond its legal requirements and its liabilities to its shareholders.	Going beyond legal requirements
1988	Gary, Owen, and Maunders [11]	Providing the community with information required to examine matters assigned to the organization.	Informing the community about the activities of organization to
1989	Anderson [12]	Commitment of businesses and society (stakeholders) to undertake legal, altruistic, and ethical actions to improve the welfare of society and comply with the national economic structure and stakeholder potentials.	Using stakeholder potentials
1991	Carroll [13]	Taking actions that are economically profitable, legal, ethical, and social.	Focusing on ethics and profitability
1993	Jafari [14]	The process of collecting, measuring, and reporting transactions and interactions between companies and society.	Developing interactions between companies and society
1996	Deegan and Rankin [15]	Social and environmental effects of business measures on shareholders.	Being accountable to shareholders

<b>Year of publication</b>	<b>Author(s)</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Main themes</b>
1999	Carroll [16]	An economically profitable business that complies with relevant regulations and conforms to ethical and social issues.	Profitability and ethics
2000	Holme and Watts [17]	The process of creating wealth and competitive advantage, providing communities with extra values and benefits, and making commitments to improve the quality of life of employees, customers, stakeholders, and society in order to achieve sustainable economic development.	Improving the quality of life of employees and achieving sustainable development
2002	Smith [18]	Continuity of economic actions and values that reflect stakeholder interests (customers, investors, employees, and society) in corporate policies.	Incorporating public views and interests into organizational policies
2004	Kärnä et al. [19]	Determining social, environmental, and economic classes with regard to the definitions offered by the International Institute for Sustainable Development and taking into account firm commitment to sustainable economic development and improvement of the quality of life of employees, families, and society.	Achieving sustainable development and improving the quality of community life
2005	Kotler and Lee [20]	Striving to improve community welfare through proper implementation of business processes and optimal distribution of corporate resources.	Improving community welfare through implementation of business processes
2008	Von Stamm [21]	Continuous commitment of enterprises to display ethical behavior, contribute to economic development, improve the quality of life of employees and their families, and establish local unions.	Committing to focus on different dimensions of society
2008	McKinley [22]	Emergence of a movement that integrates environmental and social issues into corporate decision making and business strategy in order to simultaneously enhance social, environmental, and economic performance.	Boosting economic growth and maximizing social benefits
2009	Turker [23]	This evolving concept is adopted by companies as an approach to integrate social, economic, and environmental concerns into culture, decisions, values, strategies, and	Integrating social needs into organizational practices

Year of publication	Author(s)	Definition	Main themes
		actions, develop suitable practices, and thereby improve community welfare.	
2010	Johnson <i>et al.</i> [24]	The scope of corporate tasks goes beyond compliance with relevant laws and regulations and liabilities to shareholders.	Accepting liabilities beyond the existing laws and regulations
2010	Gamerschlag <i>et al.</i> [25]	Voluntary cooperation of companies in sustainable development plans goes beyond the framework of existing requirements and regulations.	Fulfilling social responsibilities voluntarily
2011	Harjoto and Hoje [26]	Social goals are prioritized over financial objectives.	Prioritizing social goals over financial objectives.
2013	Akinyomi [27]	Planning to undertake activities beyond the interests of firm.	Planning to achieve goals beyond the financial interests of firm
2013	Lipunga [28]	Corporate community involvement disclosure.	Transparency of organizational activities for society
2014	European Commission [29]	Commitment of companies to serve as effective entities for society, integrate social, environmental, and ethical considerations, and interact with their stakeholders.	Interacting with stakeholders and observing social considerations
2017	Tetřevová [30]	Proper behavior of managers and other employees, who not only protect the economic and technical interests of the company, but also maintain the interests of all stakeholders, and voluntarily go beyond legal requirements and incorporate their interests with all corporate activities.	Respecting social responsibilities in corporate activities and merging all corporate practices
2018	Fordham and Robinson [31]	The study was based on Carroll's corporate, legal, ethical, and philanthropic dimensions. However, another dimension was added to the full range of meanings, called "CSR interaction". It involves creating social change and improving the dynamism among	Increasing interaction and participation in social activities

Year of publication	Author(s)	Definition	Main themes
		companies, local communities, and shareholders.	
2020	ElAlfy <i>et al.</i> [32]	1) Makes national and international commitments to promote sustainable development. 2) Integrates activities of companies into civil society to build sustainable and resilient communities. Due to its multi-capital approach, long-term concentration, connectivity principle, and its need for board participation, integrated reporting is especially useful for increasing public awareness of the importance of sustainable development and value creation.	Linking UN sustainability goals with CSR practices
2022	Ditlev-Simonson [33]	Certain goals that are specified by key performance indicators generally indicate whether the company takes sustainability seriously. However, the best way to ensure the integration of sustainability issues into corporate operations is to examine whether environmental and social issues are listed in the annual report - not just in a separate report.	Integrating social goals into organizational activities with a focus on sustainability goals

Figure 1 presents the evolution of the concept of CSR by summarizing the above definitions. As shown in Figure 1, the first academic definition of CSR obliges companies to prevent actions that can harm the environment and society. Over the years, the concept has developed, and even society has been authorized to judge and monitor CSR activities to improve public welfare further. The introduction of CSR into the financial and accounting literature obliged companies to disclose and report their transactions. In the early 2000s, communities introduced corporate competitive advantage and sustainable development as significant tasks for businesses. By the end of this decade, other aspects of CSR were examined. For example, practical strategies and practices were developed to address various social concerns and needs. In the 2010s, companies were obliged to serve as influential entities, observe all human rights, and protect the environment. In the last six years, the definitions of CSR have mainly focused on incorporating social responsibilities into organizational activities and practices and trying to achieve the United Nations' sustainable development goals.

A review of the research literature and an analysis of available social responsibility models indicate that companies need to interact with society as a critical component of CSR, pay more and more attention to their stakeholders, carefully address different social challenges, and meticulously assess the effects of their decisions and actions on society [16].

As mentioned before, proper fulfillment of corporate social responsibilities increases the reputation and, thereby, the value of a brand [9]. A popular brand name facilitates the recruitment of human resources and increases employee satisfaction, improving employee productivity. Based on the above definitions, considerable efforts have been made in recent years to integrate CSR into organizational activities and sub-activities to attain specific goals. Therefore, the concept of corporate social innovation (CSI), a strategic, goal-oriented, innovative, and social concept, is presented and discussed in the next section.

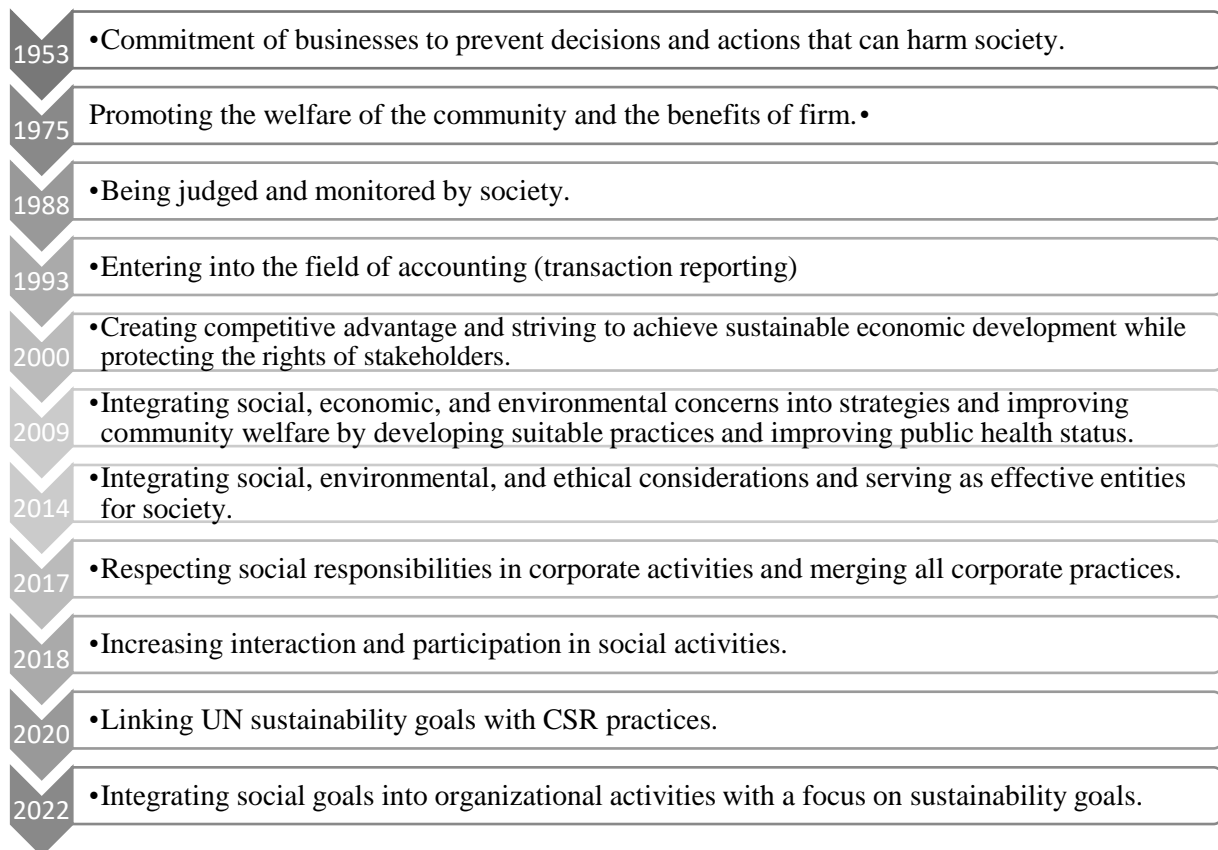


Figure 1: Evolution of CSR definitions over time

### 3. Corporate social rinnovation

Global efforts toward finding innovative solutions to complex social problems led to the development of social innovation. CSI is a strategic concept and a sub-domain of social innovation that accelerates CSR development in a purposeful, strategic, and innovative manner. This section provides a history of CSI, presents various definitions of CSI, and discusses how corporate trends and definitions have shifted from CSR to CSI over time.

*3.1 History of CSI.* The idea of CSI began in developing and technologically advanced countries with different motivations, primarily to create social value through producing new markets, products, and services and providing new definitions of social business. In the early 1990s, Grameen Bank, based in Dhaka, Bangladesh, introduced micro-credit loans, which allowed villagers to build up small savings and take out small loans. The same model was used by the Mexican cement producer CEMEX. They provided their customers with technical assistance and loans to design, build, and improve their housing. Kanter (1999) first used the term CSI in the Harvard Business Review [30].

On the other hand, in more technologically developed countries, companies align their socially profitable activities with their key strategies, functions, and processes by utilizing their entire expertise and capacities, thereby providing sustainable and measurable social benefits. This objective was not achievable only by applying CSR [31]. Today, CSI is increasingly replacing CSR in Europe, and more and more companies are using their capabilities to produce sustainable social benefits.

*3.2 Definitions of CSI.* CSI is a strategy in which a unique set of corporate assets (including innovation capacities, marketing skills, managerial insight, employee engagement, scale, and other assets) are combined in collaboration with other departments and companies in order to work out successful solutions to complicated economic, social, and environmental problems, and ultimately accelerate sustainable development of business and community. The concept of CSI has recently been widely used

and understood by companies, and the body of literature on CSI is quite limited. There is no universally accepted definition of CSI, and corporate social responsibility is often included in available definitions of CSI [32].

Table 2 Definitions of CSI

<b>Year of publication</b>	<b>Author(s)</b>	<b>Definition</b>
2006	Volberda <i>et al.</i> [34]	Development of new managerial skills, application of innovative corporate principles, and realization of high-quality forms of work to increase productivity and competitiveness.
2007	Heiskala., and Hämäläinen [35]	Social innovation is developed through expansion of managerial, normative, and cultural innovation. It primarily aims to make changes in cultural, normative, and regulatory structures of society in order to improve corporate performance and enhance sources of collective power.
2009	Hanke and stark [36]	A strategy to systematically improve corporate solutions.
2010	Hamerlinck [37]	The term social innovation is used along with the concepts of economic innovation and technological innovation. However, social innovation may be mistaken with some concepts such as organizational innovation or smart activity. Corporate social innovation is an innovative process that aims to develop dynamic management skills, use flexible forms of organization, and realize high-quality forms of work in order to increase the productivity of employees and improve the quality of work.
2012	Mirvis and Googins [38]	CSI serves businesses and tries to solve social, economic, and environmental problems. This form of innovation is a strategy that combines a series of organizational assets ( <i>e.g.</i> entrepreneurial skills, innovation capacities, managerial sensitivity, <i>etc.</i> ) in order to provide optimal solutions to existing social, economic, and environmental problems, and enhance business and community sustainability.
2014	Volans, KPMG and SiG [39]	CSI refers to an organization’s effort to achieve business success, create social and environmental value, and obtain financial benefits.
2015	Ulinski [40]	A set of corporate assets (including entrepreneurial skills, innovation potentials, managerial incentives, and mass production capacities) used to find a new solution for social challenges, and consequently create or improve social relationships, structures, or partnerships. CSI also changes businesses operations to achieve further economic, social, and environmental value.
2016	Mirvis <i>et al.</i> [41]	Tacit knowledge constitutes a huge part of the knowledge exchanged in CSI. This type of knowledge results from shared interactions and experiences of companies. Mirvis <i>et al.</i> described CSI relationship platforms along the following

<b>Year of publication</b>	<b>Author(s)</b>	<b>Definition</b>
		dimensions: 1) The distance between interactions and the value chain of firm, and 2) The intensity of investment and interactions.
2019	Carberry [42]	CSI is the result of ongoing interactions of activists, corporate executives, and other key players within a larger social innovation system. Activists prepared the ground for the expansion of social innovation, while companies took the lead in developing new practices.
2020	Dionisio and Vargas [43]	New paradigms can recreate institutions, as they open up new opportunities for resolving social problems through providing innovative business approaches.

The definitions above, generally indicate that in the early years, social innovation merely referred to the creation of social value and improvement of profitability; however, its definition gradually changed to cover the concepts and goals of sustainability. CSI aligns companies' organizational and social efforts and helps businesses overcome social, economic, and environmental problems (three pillars of sustainability). CSI is a strategy that combines a series of organizational assets (e.g., entrepreneurial skills, innovation capacities, managerial sensitivity) in order to provide optimal solutions to existing social, economic, and environmental problems and enhance business and community sustainability. Corporate social innovation has developed over the last two decades. CSI innovatively undertakes traditional CSR activities, creating direct social impacts on corporate strategies, activities, and partnerships. Table 2 presents an overview of this evolution.

Today's businesses face three interconnected challenges: shareholder demand for growth, employee desire to receive more than just money for his work, and soaring public expectations about responding to social, economic, and environmental challenges. Leading companies produce new products, services, and ideas by investing in innovative resources and practices (e.g., partnerships with social entrepreneurs and intrapreneurs). They are also participating in creative humanitarian activities, and all these activities contribute to the mitigation of social challenges, promotion of their reputation, and development of their businesses [38].

Corporate social innovation has developed over the last two decades. CSI innovatively undertakes traditional CSR activities, thus creating direct social effects on corporate strategies, activities, and partnerships. Table 3 presents an overview of the evolution from CSR to CSI.

<b>CSR</b>	<b>CSI</b>
Minimizing firm's negative impact	Maximizing positive social impact
Happens outside the firm	Part of the firm's strategy
Philanthropic intentions	Strategic goal
Stakeholder accountability	Stakeholder value
Money, manpower	Research and development ,corporate assets
Staff volunteerism	Staff development
Contract service provider	Non-governmental organizations/state partners
Social and environmental services	Social and environmental innovations

CSR	CSI
Charitable work	Sustainable social change
Planing to solve current social issues	Plans to meet the needs of society in future

Table 3 Differences between CSI and CSR [38, 44]

Significant outcomes of evolution from CSR to CSI include

- shifting from mere philanthropic intentions to strategic goals,
- adding R&D resources and other corporate assets to human and financial resources,
- shifting from volunteering activities to personal development,
- shifting from fixed-term contract services to long-term cooperation with non-governmental organizations and the government (to achieve measurable social goals),
- transforming social services into social innovations (to solve complex social problems), and
- turning charitable work into sustainable social changes.

Furthermore, the transition from CSR to CSI and the creation of sustainable social changes can provide communities with social benefits and thereby considerably alleviate multifaceted problems caused by the COVID-19 epidemic (*e.g.*, recession, poverty) [45].

#### 4. Conclusion

Businesses today face three intertwined challenges. First, only a few large corporations experience substantial revenue growth; hence, most companies focus on cost reduction, reengineering, and industry integration to achieve their profit goals. Second, many companies face rising public and stakeholder expectations to play their role in tackling social, economic, and environmental challenges. Third, there is a significant gap in staff engagement, especially among young people who expect meaning from work.

Traditional corporate responses to these challenges are not effective enough. The concept of CSR only forces companies to spend part of their profits on projects that they think would receive the best social feedback. However, in traditional charitable CSR efforts, it is often impossible to measure tangible social outcomes of activities in the long run. Companies must pursue a strategic concept that produces sustainable social changes by engaging different company segments and stakeholders. This concept is called corporate social innovation (CSI). This study first defined the concept of CSR and then showed how the definitions and concepts and corporate trends have shifted from CSR to CSI over the course of time.

Facing social challenges requires “innovation in innovation.” Social issues are business opportunities. According to Peter Drucker, “every single social and global issue of our day is a business opportunity in disguise.”[46] Companies moving towards CSI may need to rethink their current business models or design entirely new ones. In addition, they may devise new ways of building, selling, and distributing goods and services or may even make new partnership arrangements.

Social innovation is an active, creative, and progressive process. Society needs innovation in the face of appalling social and environmental dilemmas. Successful innovation can substantially improve what already exists or create something valuable and outstanding. This necessitates new voices, ideas, processes, and enthusiasm. It represents a junction of ideas and interests, where employees engage in new and satisfying practices, and social entrepreneurs co-found businesses that seek to make more significant social impacts.

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