Developing Meaning in Action:
(Re)constructing the Process of Embedding Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in Companies

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Abstract

Popular management literature in general and contemporary publications on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in particular make us believe that implementing CSR in organisations is mainly based on rational, strategic and linear conceptions. In day-to-day reality quite a different, rather “messy” pattern emerges. A pattern that can be characterised as incremental, customised and less linear than common belief would have it.

This contribution – after a brief introduction elaborating the backgrounds of the research project it is based upon - focuses primarily on the nature of this process. For this purpose it introduces and discusses a four-phase approach to implementing CSR characterised as [1] sensitising, [2] discovering, [3] embedding and [4] routinising.

Against the background of this (re)constructed approach two theoretical reflections are made after some preliminary observations. One concerning the uniqueness and thus ontological nature of these kinds of approaches and a second one concerning the nature of the organisational change they create. This contribution ends with outlining possible questions to be answered in the research still to come.

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There are two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle. Albert Einstein (1879 – 1955)

[1] Introduction

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is more and more considered to be an important “trend” in society, which requires a new way of thinking about the internal and external organisational issues of organisations, in particular companies. CSR can be described as ‘... the overall relationship of the corporation with all of its stakeholders. Elements of social responsibility include investment in community outreach, employee relations, creation and maintenance of employment, environmental responsibility, human rights and financial performance. It is about producing and/ or delivering socially and environmentally responsible products and/ or services in an environmentally and socially responsible manner. And it is about a company’s commitment to being a fair and equitable employer. And it is about strategic social investment.’ (The Conference Board of Canada, 1999). CSR is a trend that reflects changing social attitudes regarding the responsibilities that firms have towards the contexts and societies in which they operate. More than before, firms are now expected to take explicitly into account all aspects of their performance, i.e. not just their financial results, but also their social and ecological performance. Openness, accountability and transparency are some of the new key words covering a vast range of issues. A growing group of companies acknowledges this trend towards corporate social responsibility. However, they are faced with the problem of how to put the concept into practice. What does it really mean for companies to shift their attention from purely financial to sustainable profit? What are the implications of this shift and how is it translated into the going concern of the organisation?

NIDO

These questions led NIDO (National Initiative for Sustainable Development – The Netherlands) to launch a major programme entitled ‘From financial to sustainable profit’. NIDO, established in 1999, is a foundation with the purpose of structurally anchoring sustainable initiatives in society and is financed through special funds of the Dutch government. Several programmes have been developed within this
framework. The objective of this particular programme was to initiate and support change processes among and within companies, fostering a link between their financial performance and their record in ecological and social matters. In order to meet this objective various change processes were initiated in which eighteen companies collaborated. The central assumption was that the participating companies could learn from each other as well as from the interaction with external stakeholders. The shared processes that emerged between the companies involved, facilitated the identification of “gaps” and to support dedicated initiatives towards corporate social responsibility that individual companies would probably not have addressed so easily on their own. It was also assumed that implementing this programme – executed in close cooperation with (academic) research centres - could strengthen the knowledge infrastructure in the field of CSR. The programme ran from May 2000 till December 2002 (Cramer, 2003).

_Dutch National Research Programme on CSR_

One of the intriguing “new” questions that emerged during the course of the programme was how the participating companies are making sense of CSR within their own company and which factors influence this process. Therefore a follow-up research project was formulated (and granted) within the framework of the Dutch National Research Programme on CSR1. This project started early 2003. Its aim is to track and trace ongoing developments with regard to CSR within the same sample of companies for a number of years. Focus is to investigate how these companies cope with a variety of issues concerning corporate social responsibility. More in particular the research undertaken aims at understanding how organisations make sense of the concept of CSR in their day-to-day practice. In this research, entitled ‘Balancing between Thinking and Acting’, the implementation of CSR is viewed as an emerging process that is constructed through time, shaped by a series of choices of various actors and (non) intentional actions and based on continuously changing drivers. Important research questions regarding the development of this emerging and dynamic process of sense making are:

\[\text{\textsuperscript{1} See Appendix I for a summary of the Dutch National Research Programme.}\]
[1] How did the actual process of sense making regarding CSR develop over the past five years?

[2] What kind of developments do companies foresee for the years to come?

[3] Is it possible to distinguish specific patterns of action that might lead to the identification of "scenarios"?

This paper – written eight months after the start of the project that will last for two years in total - aims at providing some preliminary outcomes of this latter research project. It particularly focuses on the first research question: how the actual process of sense making regarding CSR developed over the past five years within the eighteen companies involved in the initial NIDO programme. The analysis brought forward in this contribution is grounded on information gathered during the course of this project so far. In the project until now 10 in depth interviews have been held with the companies’ representatives. Furthermore for each company an desk-research was made based upon annual reports over the past five years combined with additional written documents (e.g. zero-assessment, written accounts).

Here, first the background of the design and elaboration of the initial NIDO programme will be outlined. Second, based upon the temporary outcomes of the follow-up research project ‘Balancing between Thinking and Acting’, a model will be formulated which aims to capture the process of CSR within the eighteen companies. It therefore introduces and discusses a four-phase "model" tracing the process of implementing CSR, characterised as [1] sensitising, [2] discovering, [3] embedding and [4] routinising. This contribution is in the first instance descriptive and narrative, gradually leading towards some pre-theoretical observations and reflections. At this stage of the research it provides a first glance a rather “fuzzy” picture of the complexity of the process of implementing CSR within a business environment. Yet, just under the surface it reveals a number of interlocked theoretical issues to be addressed profoundly in the additional research and subsequent publications. Therefore they are presented here as “observations”. Against this background two theoretical reflections are made. One concerning the uniqueness and ontological nature of these kinds of approaches and a second one concerning the nature of the organisational change they create. The outcomes presented here will finally be discussed in view of future research to be carried out.
[2] Design and elaboration of the NIDO programme

In the NIDO programme eighteen companies participated, all different in size and type. Both small and medium-sized companies (SMEs) and multinationals were involved, together representing a variety of sectors. Among them were for instance Stora Enso Fine Paper Berghuizer Mill, Coca Cola Enterprises Nederland B.V., DSM (chemical company), Holding AVR-Bedrijven (waste management company), Interface (carpet manufacturer), KLM (airline company), Ordina (ICT company), Ouwehands Zoo and Rabobank Group (bank). All companies involved were located in the Netherlands. The representatives of the eighteen companies involved in the NIDO programme were usually also the ones who took the lead in trying to implement corporate social responsibility within their own organisations. In order to institutionalise their efforts, they needed to diffuse experiences they had acquired in the programme towards others in the company. This was mainly done by taking initiatives that could involve colleagues in the transformation process. From the very start of the project (intriguing) options were deliberately created to stimulate the interest of colleagues. Primarily this process was structured step-wise and kicked-off through the use of a zero- (self) assessment of the company’s performance with regard to its sustainable performance. The NIDO programme was structured around three phases. In each of the phases a set of intentional actions took place, leading to the diffusion of CSR within the company.

In the first phase the company representatives initiated co-operation with various other departments through the Sustainability Score Card initiative, which involved a zero-assessment of the company’s performance on the three Ps. Because people in these departments had to provide specific information for the zero-assessment, they became aware of the link between their own work and corporate social responsibility. Discussions were thus stimulated within the company as to what the concept CSR meant and why the organisation should get involved.

Similarly in the next phase, when participants focused on company-specific projects, it increased the involvement of other people in their company. Depending on the particular issue being addressed by the participants, specific colleagues from the organisation were called upon to provide support. For instance, those participants who focused on re-formulating the current mission and vision in order to take account
of corporate social responsibility needed the active involvement of the Board of Management. They therefore requested Senior Management to hold one or more special board meetings to discuss this matter. In cases where a company representative was trying to bring in a code of conduct, even more people, particularly at middle management level, had to be included in the process. In addition to this, the development of an action plan for corporate social responsibility required an exchange of views between the Board of Management and the middle managers, while the execution of particular actions was an issue for people from different levels of the organisation. The precise aspects, which the company representatives selected for their project, depended on their own assessment of what would fit their situation. Since they were familiar with the degree of receptivity of their organisation towards taking up issues of corporate social responsibility, they could judge which projects would be most likely to lead to success.

In the last phase of the NIDO programme the results of the company specific projects and the NIDO programme as a whole were distributed through lectures, interviews and publications (see Cramer, 2003).

Looking back, the overall experience of this programme was that the process of corporate social responsibility could be started from all kinds of "locations" in the company, based upon a rich combination of drivers and using an unlimited variety of subjects or items to get the process started. Motivated employees e.g. could generate bottom-up activities thus achieving dedicated results within their own sphere of influence. However, to get corporate social responsibility off the ground within the organisation as a whole, more than this was necessary. During the course of the project three pre-conditions turned out to be of major importance: [1] the commitment of top management, [2] manpower and money and [3] sufficient support throughout the organisation. The more these pre-conditions were met, the better the participants were able to mobilise other people throughout the company to participate in activities associated with corporate social responsibility. What also emerged was a “natural” four-phase process model, guiding the activities of change-agents and other people (gradually) involved. Characteristic for this process-model is its multi-layer nature, each phase requesting specific drivers, dedicated activities and a changing role of the change agent. Change agents play a crucial role in unfolding the process.
The remaining part of this contribution will focus on describing this four-phase process model itself, the role of drivers and change-agents.

[3] The four-phase model

Right from the start of this research project it became clear that change agents have a critical and crucial internal role in the process of developing a sense of direction regarding the contextual meaning of CSR. The results presented here are based on interviews with the change agents that also participated in the NIDO programme. Change agents can come from a variety of backgrounds. Sometimes they seem to be the natural leader for this moment in time. Sometimes they present themselves wanting to take the lead in the process. Sometimes they are asked by their bosses (or even being the boss themselves) to take the lead in the process. They all have in common to be personally motivated ("infected") to bring about change processes in their company regarding CSR. These change agents are the key-moderators in constructing and developing the process of embedding CSR within the company. The most important "task" they have is to make general notions regarding corporate social responsibility suitable for the organisational context.

Despite the rational and linear implementation mantras proclaimed in popular management literature, the process of embedding CSR within a specific organisational context can be considered as a rather "messy affair", with a strong incremental nature. Out of the research so far a four-step process (or: model) has emerged. One could characterise various phases in this model with the following key words: [1] Sensitising: becoming receptive to CSR leading to a certain level of awareness, [2] Discovering: experimenting through small initiatives and concrete projects, [3] Embedding: linking in with structural and system aspects of the organisation and [4] Routinising: linking CSR to the company's core-competencies. Going through those four steps is first of all initiated and shaped by a (internal) change-agent. Furthermore it is shaped and guided by a dynamic configuration of (internal and external) drivers, meaningful for the organisation at hand.

It also became clear that the use and role of drivers evolve during the different phases in the process. Still, in each phase a specific configuration of drivers can be
recognised. Concisely described these configurations can be characterised as follows:

Drivers Phase 1: primarily derived from the societal (internal and external) context linked to the social maturity and receptiveness of the company and their willingness to act upon those drivers.

Drivers Phase 2: chosen on the basis of the functional position and personality of the change agent and strongly related to the nature and culture of company leading to “cultural fitness”.

Drivers Phase 3: growing emphasis on economic drivers such as reputation management, strategic positioning and added value in the market.

Drivers Phase 4: economic and strategic drivers move to the foreground seriously linking in to the core-business of the organisation.

Below a narrative overview will be given, characterising each of the phases in the process model. Besides a general description of the nature of the phase itself it will subsequently pay attention to the specific set of drivers relevant in this phase and the role of change agents. Each phase will be illustrated with anonymous examples taken from the interviews.

Phase 1: Sensitising
Characteristic for this first phase is the development of a kind of diffuse receptiveness for CSR. Companies have many reasons to start focusing on CSR. In trying to find out what CSR could mean at this stage and how they could handle the subject, drivers are very diverse. Sometimes they are purely external, sometimes more internal. Important drivers are sometimes related to external pressure, such as a campaign by a national NGO against the use, by a particular company, of dispensable packaging. They can also come from within the organisation, e.g. reducing absence due to illness or improving the internal social cohesion. Drivers are not necessarily limited to a specific branch or business sector. Organisations face the same kind of pressure from society to take environmental measures and to become
more transparent. As one company representative during the interview said: “A lot of emotion regarding our image is linked to our product being in the centre of society. Therefore a lot of stakeholders want to interfere with us.” Another company started changing their way of reporting according to society’s demands “from ‘tell me’ to ‘show me’ and ‘prove to me’. Two other companies that are both intrinsically people-oriented, use this as the point of entry to reflect on the CSR. Overall drivers relating to the social context of companies are bringing the issue of CSR onto the company agenda.

Rather “intuitively” and iteratively a small “inner circle” of people are gradually becoming aware of the issue. In some cases this is just one person. While not necessarily action is undertaken, the subject is “fermenting” under the surface of the going concern. Gradually a sense of necessity and willingness is growing among various people. Still there is not yet a dedicated “change agent” nominated in this phase. People involved are generally aware of the various – if not very diverse - motives. As a result of this diffuse and un-focused process taking place during this initial phase the issue of CSR is recognised as being important for the organisation at hand. It leads to accepting the necessity to deal with CSR. What the actual significance is, remains unclear. Important result of this phase is that – whatever the meaning – CSR is put upon the agenda of the company.

**Phase 2: Discovering**

When the companies decide to really start working on CSR, a dedicated change agent is nominated who acts as the initiator and catalyst. He elicits a rich variety of small projects and starts spreading the “CSR concept” in different ways. It should be noted that none of the companies introduces a holistic concept of CSR in this phase. Characteristic for the actions taken in this phase are their impulsive and “small” nature. Taken all these projects as a whole it gradually leads to an iterative process of constructing some common ground in the organisation regarding a still very diffuse notion on corporate social responsibility. Although the projects are very diverse, they have in common that they need to lead to visible if not practical results, not necessarily financially but e.g. in improved reputation or increased staff motivation. The driving forces of the change agent in this phase are his personal commitment
and enthusiasm. He or she considers himself a broker who continually translates some diffuse general concept of CSR into suitable organisational language and actions related to the nature and culture of the company.

In this phase the company has not yet mapped out a plan on where to start and how to manage CSR; it is more trial and error than anything else. In this learning by doing approach the direction of the process depends on the vision of the change agent, his circle of influence and the freedom of movement that he is allowed by the company. The change agent initiates projects within the reach of his own functional position and according to his or her own preferences. Basically it is the change agent that is shaping and guiding the process. An important additional role is to move between the contexts of the company and society developing or using an antenna for appealing topics. Furthermore he or she needs to have a strong gut-feeling searching for the right ‘momentum’ to introduce new activities.

During this phase change agents become strongly aware of the need to expend the process. The essence is to broaden the scope and circle of influence. This need for expending possible actions calls for the involvement of a broader scope of actors. It also calls for a reflection in action concerning the initial role(s) of the change-agent(s).

Reflection in action

In order to carry through the implementation of CSR, companies need to review and reflect the Phases 1 and 2. Crucial is to extend the scope (and number) of the activities. In order to foster a company wide diffusion of CSR, above all more people need to be involved. The initial change agent is no longer at the hart of the CSR developments. The circle of influence needs to be transferred and expended to other dedicated actors, taking in turn the role of change agent. At the same time a new and customised set of drivers will emerge giving way to more feasible targets. Shifts towards drivers that more and more focus on the business-position. Companies start searching for connections with their core business related to the market value. As a result economic drivers are moving to the foreground. The emerging approach towards CSR becomes more strategic and aimed at gaining bottom-line added value.
For example an airline company kicked off a project with a business unit, which ended fairly soon because the unit manager did not recognise the relevance when looking at the company-targets given to him. He would have been much keener on cooperation if the advantages had been clear in the light of his business-unit’s strategy and business targets. While moving from Phase 2 into Phase 3 it remains striking that the broader concept of CSR is not applied. Dealing with CSR remains above all “local”: company and business-unit specific.

Phase 3: Embedding
This phase is clearly focused on linking CSR to the company’s core-competencies. The essence is to expand the capacity building, stimulated throughout the organisation by (new) change-agents. The role of the change agent is here to mobilise first of all others in the organisation in order to foster capacity building in the organisation. This makes it necessary to provide a new set of drivers and arguments, together with goals leading towards the achievement of implementation. The question remains what kind of factors is influencing the successful move towards this third phase. It is clear that economic arguments start to play a more and more important role, thus moving away from modest activities with less impact on the core-business.

Moving through this phase requires a different emphasis on an already existing set of organisational competencies. This leads to growing attention for management systems (such as EFQM, ISO, Balanced Score Card) and the role they could play – after customisation – in the phase at hand. Thus, in one case the change agent started to develop activities on the basis of the rating requirements leading to the acceptance in sustainability funds. These requirements provided a challenge for people in other departments to start thinking about CSR, which eventually lead to changes in their way of working. It also puts pressure on the role of the change agent. From the initial foreground he or she should move into the background, thus giving way to the initiatives of others in the organisation. The emphasis in the “new” role should be put on engaging others who in turn become “change agent(s)”. This requires the competence of the change agent to change his or her repertoire in time, in order to keep the momentum in the process. The focus of this phase should
primarily be on linking in others in the organisation in the process of embedding CSR. It might even become appropriate for a change agent to be appointed in a specific business-unit in order to “spread the word” more locally and directly.

This process of expanding can be supported at the same time by more structural choices and activities leading e.g. to (specially created) departments with supportive activities such as Public Relations or Personnel. In one case the annual reporting on CSR was taken over by the PR department and local units were at the same time encouraged to initiate CRS activities. In yet another case a special department for CSR was created in order to support other divisions. Also change agents were sent out to business units in order to stimulate decentralized initiatives. In addition special workshops were organised to inform others and arouse their interest. In a third example line managers received business targets on CSR [“triple P”] related to their unit’s strategies and processes. Whatever the chosen approach, CSR became part of a regular management assessment system. The process as a whole becomes more “tough” and needs to link in gradually with the core business of the organisation.

Phase 4: Routinising

During this fourth and final phase CSR ought to integrate into the “veins” of the organisation. CSR is interpreted and understood in such a way that it forms a natural part of all (business) decisions taken. The fact that this phase will emerge is more based on a (academic) guess, than supported by empirical evidence so far. Neither the interviews so far nor the material analysed during the desk-research, provide explicit business-examples. So the introduction of this phase is based on circumstantial cues derived from the material. Most companies in the sample are navigating somewhere between Phase 2 and 3, if not struggling to find out more precisely which phase they are in and how to proceed.

It goes without saying that once again this phase requires reconsidering the role of the agent(s) and the appropriate drivers. Hypothetically it could be stated that once CSR is entering the going concern of the core business, the role of change agents is over. Dealing with CSR ought to become a regular management task translated into the mission, vision, policy and strategies of the organisation and naturally translated
into systems, structures and additional tools. With regard to the drivers it becomes apparent that those addressing the financial bottom-line are coming to the forefront. Further research is needed here to discover why many organisations have not reached this stage yet so what possible barriers are blocking this next step in the process.

Looking back at the four-phase model introduced and described above, a number of observations appear appropriate. These observations are pre-theoretical in nature. They are “sensitising-concepts” indicating issues that need to be elaborated based on further research. They also require a more profound theoretical analysis and reflection during the part of the project still to come. So, for now they have no other than an indicative role.

Observation 1
It becomes strikingly clear that the role of change agents change over time during the different phases. Their behaviour (expressed in action) is constantly assessed and shaped based upon its perceived impact within a specific organisational (local) environment. One could describe this behaviour as “linking in” or “tuning in”; through the deliberate (yet often implicit) use of a variety of “tools”, aligning actions with the dominant organisational culture. This alignment can be shaped through the use of dedicated language, “small-band” concepts and a rich variety of activities either carried out by themselves or others.

Observation 2
Relatively much has been said about drivers so far. It became clear that drivers differ over time during the various phases of the process. Although the labels under which drivers can be classified result in a compact universe, their impact given the actual organisational setting can vary greatly. Furthermore it needs to be clear that the same drivers can be used in a multi-layer way, having a variable significance at different moments during the process. The result is a dynamic set of customised drivers constantly changing in terms of impact and meaning during the course of the process.
**Observation 3**
Introducing CSR and coming to (initial) grips with it within the context of the organisation is an almost purely incremental process ignited by a set of customised set of drivers. The process is not determined by the nature of the business but through the key-actors navigating between the company and its environment. These key-actors are the “inner-circle” developing a minor yet actionable meaning of CSR. The common and widely shared assumption that the process is guided by a kind of overall concept of what corporate social responsibility means in the organisation right from the start, is therefore false. None of the respondents has been talking about a guiding vision or clear-cut perspective on CSR right from the start of the process. They themselves are constantly struggling with the “translation” trying to develop a more encompassing understanding of the concept as a whole while at the same times implementing “bits and pieces” they deem relevant.

**Observation 4**
Starting the process is not the most difficult for change agents. By starting small and relying on an already established circle of influence it is relatively easy to identify projects and add issues or elements. An important competence of change agents is to continuously search for small opportunities and not move to far ahead of the crowd. This requires a constant search for opportunities that can provide modest building blocks in developing the organisational capability to further explore and develop CSR. In its most modest form it is the process of incrementally building the sustainable enterprise.

**Observation 5**
During the process (especially when moving into phase 3 and 4) economic drives gradually become more important. Companies develop the capability to emphasize different aspects of CSR and therefore can concentrate on those aspects that support economic added value. In order to proceed successfully, companies need to link dedicated drivers with the nature of the business. Basically all drivers are judged on this value. Based on the research outcomes so far it does not become clear why and how an organisation moves into this next and final phase, what kind of instruments could support this move and what the characteristics are of change agents able to manage going through this phase successfully.
Observation 6
Full-fledged implementation requires the repositioning of the (initial) change agent(s) and the role(s) they should perform. Moving beyond the initial phase(s) requires strategic (re)positioning demanding other competencies and skills not necessarily belonging to the talents of the ones that started the process. In addition to clear strategic choices – for which the initial change agent is not by definition always well positioned – it demands above all the support of a growing number of people in the company leading towards a critical mass. Fundamental question is how this process of expanding the number of change agents is being shaped? What kind of diffusion approach is required?

Observation 7
An important issue is the internal development of “phase-awareness”. In particular change-agents should be extremely aware of the particular phase a company finds itself in. Important pit-falls with regard to this are: not being aware of moving into the next phase or how to move into the next phase. How long can an organisation stay in a certain phase (in particular Phase 2) without losing the momentum? Especially going through the first two phases should lead to growing and expending social support in the organisation. Without this support further diffusion and implementation is unachievable.

Observation 8
A last observation here concerns the use of “instruments” during the various phases. Despite the kick-off during the initial NIDO programme through the use of a zero-assessment, instruments do not seem to play a crucial role in building the capability to embed CSR in the company. They are certainly used, but emerge as almost purely facilitative. This leaves questions regarding the nature and appropriateness of these instruments unanswered. What kinds of instruments are really useful in what kind of context? Furthermore what kind of instruments is suitable for a specific phase?

[5] Some theoretical reflections
The outcomes of this research provide ample opportunity for various theoretical elaborations. To name just a few: so far it hasn’t become clear what the (ontological)
nature of drivers is nor how a specific configuration of them is "chosen" within a specific context. Neither is clear what determines the life cycle of a specific (set of) driver(s). Looking into the role and “nature” of change agents offers yet another intriguing subject. What are the competencies and capabilities required at the start of the process of implementing CSR and how are talents brought to the fore (if not discovered) that are needed in later phases? Last but not least what is the nature of the process of diffusion and what can be said about the creation and size of a suitable and appropriate ‘critical mass’? It goes without saying that many other subjects are encapsulated in the observations that need to be thoroughly investigated. Yet, given the focus of this contribution, only two concise theoretical side-steps will be made. One will focus on the nature of the four-phase process model introduced previously. The other will be questioning the model itself and the character of transformation(s) it brings about. In order to introduce these side steps correctly, some very brief remarks are made about the nature of organisations themselves.

Organising CSR

Organisations can be regarded as social artefacts defined and successfully operating through a multi-level set of strategic, operational and emerging (messy) processes of social and material interchange between participants. Outcomes of this bundle of processes are not only determined by one’s own moves, but also by the moves of one’s partner(s). A process that not only leads to more communication, more participants, more projects and more interactions, but finally to an “arena of transactions”, all more or less contributing to building the capability to reach an overarching goal (or set of goals). Processes within an organisation are generally designed for specific purposes or to achieve particular ends. However, rather than simply introducing an additional set of processes to under-pin the changing relationship between the organisation and its actors (including the change-agent, and other people inside and outside the organisation), the model as it emerges requires fundamentally different types of thinking and processes that so far have not commonly been part of normal business practice. These processes are not necessarily based on a commonality of interests or concerns or on an unequivocal outcome or objective. They are processes that must be capable of dealing with complex and “fuzzy” issues that are often ideologically based with problematic,
indeterminate answers. So the key-issue here is whether these processes can be organised – and if the answer is “yes” how they could be organised.

**Questioning the four-phase model**

A first issue to be elaborated is to question the nature and the uniqueness of the model introduced above. Management literature in general and also many publications on CSR suggest that implementing CSR in organisations is mainly based on rational, strategic and linear conceptions (e.g. Kotter, 1996). Mauser (2002:19) states: “Depending on the paradigm on which a model is based, the models vary extensively in their characteristics. The common denominator, however, is that most of the models are stage or phase models that describe development in time, which consists of the increasing integration of ... concerns in a firm policies or strategies.” She continues to say: “Each model introduces its own vocabulary for the distinct stages” and just a bit further “In general, these models are characterises by quite a static approach, in which firms are simply placed in a certain stage at a certain moment in time ...” On the basis of an extensive literature survey she then presents an overview of more than 50 models “... which probably covers only part of all ... management models that ever have been developed”. This universe is then brought back to six models on the basis of three criteria. One of the criteria in particular is of interest here: the nature of the models. To demonstrate this she introduces the “continuum model”(Petulla, 1987), “the environmental strategy portfolio” (Steger, 1988), “a five-stage continuum model” (Hunt & Auster, 1990), the “internal processes” model (Roome, 1992), the “strategic options for ... product development” model (Lee and Green, 1994) and finally the “non-linear progression model” (adopted from Ghobadian et al., 1998). The four-phase process model introduced earlier in this contribution at first inspection seems to be affiliated with the “internal processes model” and with the “non-linear progression model”. It also resembles a more “classical” stage model. Still it can’t be denied that in day-to-day reality a rather “messy” pattern emerges. This brief reflection demonstrates the need for an in-depth comparison of the nature of different management models in order to determine the nature of the model here, inductively derived from the empirical findings. This comparison – to be carried out at a later stage of the research – could answer questions regarding the “uniqueness” of the model, its transferability (e.g. the usefulness in other situations) and its theoretical and practical validity.
Creating transformation

A second set of questions focuses on the way the four-phase model creates transformation. This transformation is essayed through developing capability. This capability is linked with the (assumed) impact of the activities of the change agent and others. The fulcrum of this capability is to embed CSR in the going concern of the organisation. The question remains what guides the actual progression and implementation of the transformation. Are the acts themselves creating the capability? That in turn raises issues regarding the “transformational nature” and the impact of these acts. This is contradicted by the research findings so far since – with an emphasis on the vast universe of activities used in the first two phases – the nature of the acts does not really seem to matter. If this really is the case, another fundamental question emerges: what really creates the transformation? What then is the (ontological) nature of the impact of a certain activity – or series of activities - in a particular context? All these questions address primarily the complex issue of how the relation between the result of a process, its sub-processes and subsequent actions is being shaped, given a specific organisational context. Actions are of a normative nature since they are supposed to lead to a transformed situation considered an improvement. Key to this process is the notion of 'intent': assumptions regarding the nature and effect of specific actions with regard to their capability to deliver the intended transformation (Jonker & Eskildsen, 2002). Complex and vague notions are transferred into [actionable] conditions and means to pursue certain outcomes with success. The second important assumption here is the manageability of a specific organisational property, the capability to embed CSR. All these questions taken together require reflecting more thoroughly on the "global" doctrine of action and the acts themselves leading to capability development. This reflection could lead to the identification of a transformation methodology. The methodology itself will not contain an illustration of what must be done in each individual case to embed CSR, but rather contain the principles and techniques that can be generally applied to implement it. Thus, the four-phase approach depicted above contains a set of variable elements necessary for the effort to succeed, as well as some principles (related to how, in general, those elements should be put together) for a successful transformation.
Insights gained in this research show that implementing corporate social responsibility is above all a “messy” search-and-discovery process in which people continually make incremental choices thus constructing gradually an organisational transformation. This actual construction process – as becoming apparent from the research so far - is executed along the lines of a four-step approach. A process in first instance led by and coordinated through the act and activities of change-agents initiating and stimulating the specific transformation suitable for the organisational context at hand. What is particularly striking in this process – especially at the start – is the absence of an assumed global and guiding (conceptual) perspective. Instead vague guiding notions and rather small ‘elements’ of an overall implicit vision on corporate social responsibility are used almost at random. Developing the organisational capability to really embed further down the process corporate social responsibility into the organisation is based upon “trial and error”, personal preferences of the change-agents and the (dynamic) situation at hand. Key to this emerging organisational process is developing the capability and critical mass of the organisation to deal with corporate social responsibility. Taken for granted assumptions concerning the rollout of a linear and structured transformation process derived from a clear perspective right from the start, should therefore be abandoned. Instead the process is constructed on the basis of those actions deemed suitable for the organisational (micro) context. Given the empirical findings, the two brief theoretical reflections offer ample food for thought. Fundamental questions regarding the unique nature of the transformational process, its properties to build capability and the role (intentional) actions play in this processes, must therefore remain unanswered for the moment.

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<th>Authors</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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</tbody>
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