



What is the role for CSR in “Food for Life 2025”?

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Abstract

The courage to look into the future helps us handle situations today. What does the world and the food situation look like in 20 years to come? It is a daunting thought that provokes more questions and a deeper analysis. Studies of the future and books like “Silent spring” create a need for debate and awareness of food, health, social and environmental issues in a long term perspective. Even if these future scenarios are somewhat speculative, and perhaps even incorrect, they may stimulate debate and create an increased awareness – of our need to look ahead. It implies taking on roles and an awareness of perspectives that is rarely communicated in today’s fast moving society. Bearing in mind that food is one of our primary needs; an optimistic view of “Food for Life 2025” is summarized in three Rs, responsibility, resource use and reconciliation. In corporate life, as well as in private life today, taking on social responsibility is voluntary. In the future, however, CSR may very well be an institutionalized standard that tomorrow’s corporate leaders take for granted.

1 Health – in a long term perspective

Public health is of interest for all stakeholders in a national, as well as an international, perspective. Health is not just absence of sickness – it is a part of life quality, something that most of us take for granted in our daily lives. A look around the world, however, reveals major health related flaws and problems. Some of these problems are related to natural catastrophes but others are tied to societal conditions or self imposed actions as a part of an unhealthy life style. Who carries the responsibility for health in a long term perspective?

Building and maintaining health promoting systems around the world can be divided into different activities and time perspectives: traditional public health – treatment and ongoing daily activities (Raphael & Bryant, 2005) and health policy programs with a long term perspective (Thurston et al., 2005).

A long term perspective is expressed in *health policy programs* that set the conditions for the future needs for health services. The perspective includes national issues such as taxation, social health related programs and educational standards (Kramper-Jorgensen et al., 2004). It is in the development of these long term policies and societal conditions for health that the long-term framework is set (Raphael, 2003). These programs are aimed at preventive actions, to delay the onset of health conditions. So far, in most countries, health policy issues have been the primary responsibility of the government. Independent of health treatment system, private or state run institutions, the costs for health care are steadily increasing - and they are forecasted to increase even more if the issue of preventive health is not addressed (Persson et al., 2004). Preventive health in so called proactive health programs refers to engaging society at large in food security and health-related activities. However, in most of these analyses, the corporate role in this process is omitted, or simply not thought of, in the rather traditional analysis and suggestions of future improvements within the frames of the existing systems (Lega, 2005).



The World Health Organization defines health promotion as the process of enabling people to take control over, and improve their health (WHO, 2004). In a structural analysis basic prerequisites for health are identified as: peace, shelter, education, food, income, a stable ecosystem, sustainable resources, social justice and equity. These prerequisites are handled in five platforms for actions: building public health policies, creating supportive environments, strengthening community action, developing personal skills and providing health services. This paper is concerned with the platforms of building a supportive environment for continued CSR engagement. It is focused on businesses in general and food businesses in particular.

In most analyses of public health the focus lies on policies to restore and enhance social long-term programs. The main actor is the government and its many agencies. The role that business may take is often omitted in the analysis (Höjgård, 2005). When it is included, the perspective of what businesses are willing to do with regards to social responsibility is quite negative. Contrary to Teeple (2000), that views government as generally helpless to resist the power of powerful corporations, I perceive that corporations have an important role to play with regards to social responsibility issues, which is the focus of the paper.

1.1 Aim and delimitations

This paper is concerned with addressing the possibility of CSR, Corporate Social Responsibility, as a part of a food related proactive health strategy. Assuming that CSR programs is one way of showing corporate engagement in food related health policy issues, how can these initiatives be supported? CSR programs may cover a vast number of social issues and problem areas. This study is delimited to food-related CSR issues since they serve as primary needs in all human life.

Sweden is often brought up as a good example in the way societal interests of public health are met in progressive long term policies (Buhrström et al., 2002). However, Buhr and Hermansson (2004) argue that the way that governmental support is provided in order to encourage corporate engagement in Sweden is not outstanding by any means. On the contrary, they present a more developed strategy carried out by the government in the UK in supporting means to stimulate CSR engagement in small and medium size business.

The scenario, chapter 2, is written from a Swedish perspective but it includes a number of CSR issues that are internationally recognized (Young & Welford, 2002). The food related health issues that a CSR program may address will thus vary in scope depending on the perspective (Shrivastava, 1995).

1.2 Approach and structure of the paper

The paper is based on a back casting¹ scenario, an empirical speculative vision labelled “Food for life 2025” (KSLA, 2005), that is put in relation to the concept of the development of continued food- related CSR procedures and standards. The scenario, in chapter 2, illustrates a view where the corporate world shows willingness to take on responsibility above and beyond that of a traditional business. The conditions for CSR are further discussed in Chapter 3.

¹ ‘**Back-casting**’ refers to think backwards from a desirable or unavoidable future situation (www, SusHouse 1, 2006).



2 Food for Life 2025

Tell me what you eat and I will tell you who you are. Food continues to be a question of identity. The products in themselves are differentiated to meet different needs and wants of the wealthy nations of the world. The health conscious consumer actively seeks products in the land of health-related food products, for example functional foods, nutraceuticals and medical nutrition products (Figure 1). Many food products also provide a basis for the consumer to express values in terms of production (organic), technical (GMO) and social values (CSR values).

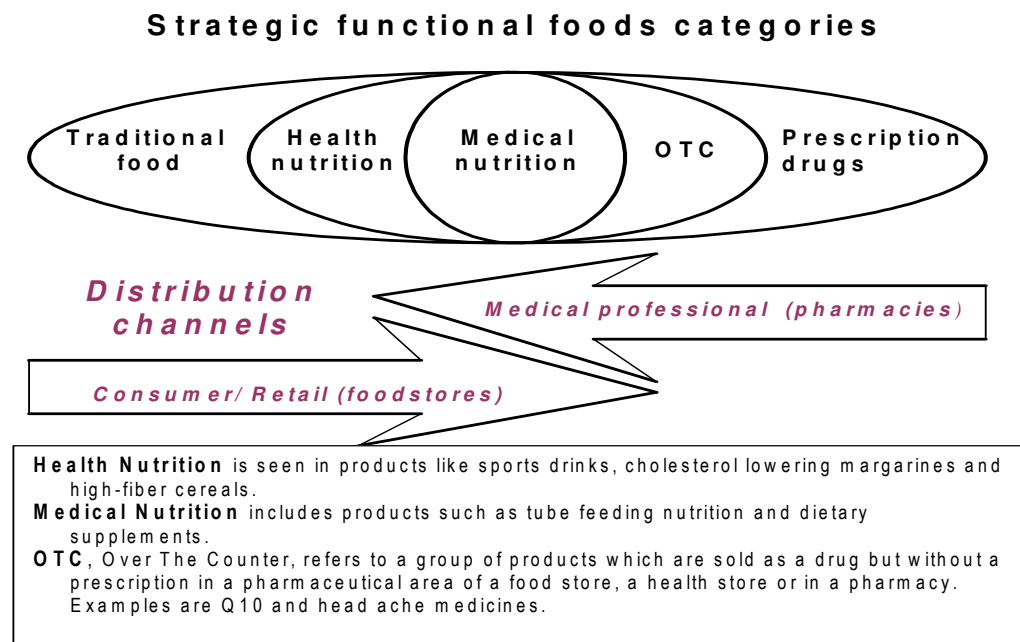


Figure 1. From food to pharmaceutical product. The differences are gradually fading as the distribution channels become all the more integrated (Mark-Herbert, 2002).

A diversified product profile opens new avenues with regards to distribution channels and market communication. It refers to food and medicine approaching in shape (product) as well as in distribution channel (where they can be purchased). In the future, pharmaceutical products may even become an integrated part of a food selection, found in an aisle at the supermarket, next to health products.

Food products continue to be carriers of value over and above the nutritional value they contain. These values provide a basis of identity for the consumer in which economic as well as social values are expressed in purchasing patterns. Most actors in the food arena are very aware of the consumers' needs and one way of simplifying their purchasing choices is to develop strong brands that coincide with the consumers' needs.

2.1 Actors and roles in the food arena

Food is nutrients, togetherness, a daily chore, a livelihood, a part of our health and a part of our identity. Our food preferences change as we reach new phases in our lives, but we are rather conservative in our habits and choices. If we have grown up with a certain kind of cheese, we tend to purchase it even as grown-ups. There are a few times in our lives when we are willing to change our food habits: when we give up breast-feeding (well, that is a semi-voluntary change in many

cases), when we meet our life partner, have kids of our own and when we are faced with a health-related trauma, for example a heart attack. Our habits and preferences are deeply rooted – and many actors in the food system are interested in knowing about them (Holmberg, 1996).

As a mature and conservative system, the food system supports its stakeholders in doing what they always have done. No stakeholder has any great expectations of sudden changes (as in many other industries, such as pharmaceutical and telecom). The food system can be seen in terms of a number of stakeholders with a legal and political setting that creates the framework (Figure 2). These stakeholders are presented more closely below.

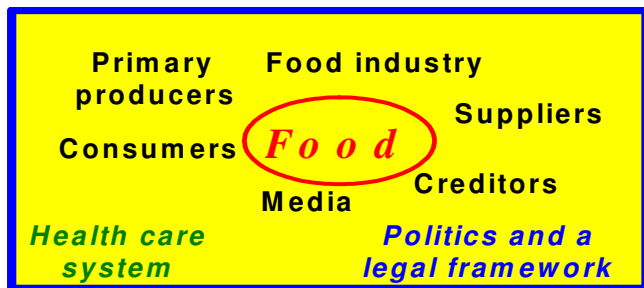


Figure 2. Important stakeholders in a food system. The box represents a formal frame in terms of political and legal conditions for each of the stakeholders. Food is not a stakeholder but rather the focal point for the analysis. The health care system is regarded as an indirect actor.

A political and legal frame constitutes a setting and one of many languages on the food arena. Consumer's values are conveyed in political agendas; the development of a *health care system* and in actual daily consumer behavior. A continued internationalization of the food system refers to an expanded market for most food actors, which puts larger corporations at advantage since they have the resources that it takes to expand in a new market. For the national food industry, relative advantages will serve as a basis for strategic choices. An expanded market will lead to more competitive pressures, which in turn will bring down prices for the consumers.

In terms of proactive *health system*, food is also an important factor as an indicator of the general health status of society. Steadily increasing costs for health care in terms of sick-leave, medical treatment and pharmaceuticals (LIF, 2004) strongly motivate a more *pro-active* sociological and economical engagement. These *pro-active* incentive systems are lacking in, for example, Sweden (Axelsson, 2000; Porter & Olmsted-Teisberg, 2004). Treatment of the effects of over-consumption (for example coronary heart disease and diabetes II) will be given lower priority as the budget for the medical care is gradually cut (Sandström & Schuber, 2004) The consumers will thus have to carry the responsibility for their self imposed conditions. One way of assisting the consumers would thus be the investment that refers to development of food products that delay the onset of a certain common disease (Mark-Herbert, 1993). A similar analysis of the public health status was carried out in Japan during the 1980s. It showed a clear picture of a diminishing workforce that carried the responsibility for an increasing number of retired people with a poor health status and yet expectations of a continued high quality of life. Japan thus made a major strategic national investment in the area of developing health-related food products, so called, FOSHU (functional foods). These products are since then gradually marketed after a thorough medical evaluation.

Health related food products have contributed to increased health status as well as strategic industrial investments (e.g. patents and know-how). In Finland, a national investment in the same field was motivated by a desire to create strategic advantages for the food industry.

Primary production, e.g. farmers – they continue to decrease in number over time. The farms grow in average size. Farmers also produce biological input for other industries besides the food sector, for example, pharmaceutical and energy industry, and immaterial products, such as horseback riding and countryside living, e.g. bed-and-breakfast establishments.

The greatest resource for certain agricultural production is, no doubt, the clean environment. It is only a matter of time before the ground water in most of Europe is so contaminated that it is no longer fit for drinking water or food production (SIWI, 2004). This is where techniques such as phyto-remediation (plants that accumulate and detoxify environmentally hazardous substances) will provide a possible re-use of certain previously contaminated farming land.

The food industry continues the gradual change process to meet the demands of increased competitive pressures. An example is the continued introduction of food corporations on the stock market. Some of the larger corporations grow and create value through acquisition of well functioning family food businesses where the local brands are kept and supported.

Strategic investments where research organizations, such as universities, R&D-intensive industry and industrial organizations, and industrial partners collaborate lead to new products and values that can be illustrated in terms of brands and patents (Figure 3).

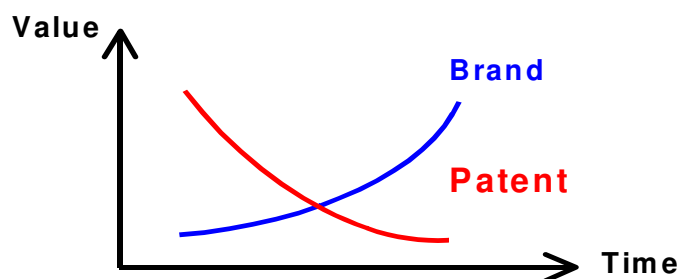


Figure 3. Product development as a strategic investment, based on immaterial rights such as patents and brands (Mark-Herbert, 2002).

Radically new food products are associated with R&D, which may lead to immaterial rights such as patents and brands. Quality control in terms of traceability is a condition for working with value added products. Quality, health benefits, a strong business image – all of these are parts of corporate strategic values. These values are carried in brands that the consumer recognizes. Openness and honesty thus become conditions for communication as well as holding a long-term position on the food and pharmaceutical market. A transparent system provides a thorough control of seriousness of each stakeholder.

The competitive pressures in the food industry are steadily increasing which forces the **suppliers** to re-organize in order to accommodate to the changes that are promoted when new actors enter the market. The general price level on food products is gradually lowered. The suppliers' response is to strengthen their positions with regards to private labels. Swedish food stores have a relatively low proportion of private label products compared to, for example, the UK (van der Krogt, 2003). Many stores are altered to fit the profile of their customers and they are closely tied to the supplier through membership with rewarding bonus systems.

The financial institutes are gradually gaining awareness of the need to incorporate environmental and social values in their credential evaluations. Having the right customers not only becomes a matter of image but also a business strategy to avoid risk. New instruments and procedures for a corporate social responsibility declaration are developed as a part of finding new procedures. Loyal and trustworthy customers are rewarded and the ties are further strengthened.

Media continues to show much interest for food and health. Every daily paper with self-respect has a health section and a panel of experts that express their opinion in daily matters. Unfortunately, the consumers are exposed to many contradictory and poorly grounded health related news that hardly motivate consumers to alter their habits (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Changing and sometimes contradictory advice commonly meets the consumers (Reproduced by kind permission of PRIVATE EYE magazine, www.private-eye.co.uk).

The general interest in food among people at large is strengthened by tempting cookbooks, the general interest TV-programs, and research reports that are reported in daily paper.

Lastly, the *consumer*, you and I, in 20 years or so. We are habitual and we are aware of the rights that age brings. In short, we want to enjoy the weekends. In our every-day life food does not take much time. Once the weekend arrives, we allow for time in the kitchen, and enjoyment related to food. Pre-processed food products are part of our every day food endeavor, as well as our weekend enjoyment, fast and simple but we are still attracted by the thought of being able to cook from scratch. Our awareness of health makes us eat less fat and sugar in our every day life, but we like the idea of a “splurge” at festive times.

Based on older models, the so-called plate model and the food pyramid, new models are created, among others the diamond model (Figure 5). It shows the relation between intake in the top triangle and energy consumption in the lower triangle. A “bigger” top triangle will lead to weight gain. The model provides concrete advice and pictures of healthy diets, given a certain stage in life and level of activity.

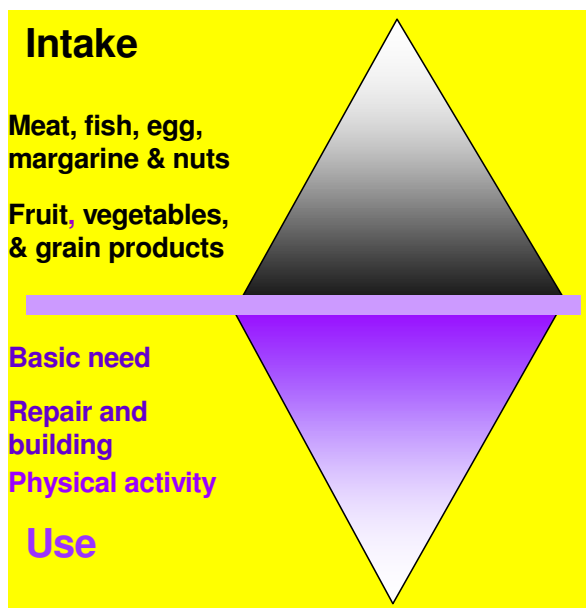


Figure 5. "Diamond model", shows how food intake is related to energy consumption through physiological needs and physical activity (own model).

Consumer preferences and needs constitute grounds for how consumers are divided into segments. These segments are used in marketing as well as medical information regarding how health is related to food habits (Dreyfuss, 2004).

2.2 Life 2025

All stakeholders in the food system (Figure 2) are dependant on changes in climate, political policies, international agreements and social trends. The winding path towards a win-win situation for the stakeholders in the food system is dependant on many wise decisions. These decisions concern strategic issues such as conditions for technological development and socioeconomic development.

Technical development

One of the difficult areas to forecast and comprehend is the technical aspects of production that we in daily conversations refer to as "GMO". These techniques bring possibilities and risks that create expectations (Hedin, 2002) as well as fears (Ekström & Askegaard, 2000). Strong opinions are raised in the debate but no political stand is taken. Few consumers know that many health related products in our daily lives are based on GMO techniques, such as insulin. The public awareness of what GMO implies gradually grows – and as it does, the discussion of pros and cons is further nuanced.

Technical advancements also provide grounds for individual information regarding genetic predisposition to diseases and medical conditions (Bruzelius, 2003). It does not, however, allow for a public display of health records. Private medical services offer customers individualized diet plans - for those who can pay for it. This is where the uneven distribution of resources in the world is painfully clear: In one part of the world we see a struggle to survive and in another part of the world we see medical treatment to cure effects of over-consumption.



One of the largest future resources in the world economy is related to immaterial rights on food-related DNA (Thorsson, 2004). Developing countries have a hard time to defend their rights, so the rich part of the world exploits what rightfully should have belonged to the developing countries. A future, very important task is to legally advise developing countries in these matters to counteract social polarization. Patents, brands, license agreements and legal rights will continue to play important roles in justifying the rights to resources in an international perspective.

Creative new product applications from bi-products are being developed by the food industry. The dairy industry is successful at developing collaboration projects beyond their own product horizon with, for example, the pharmaceutical industry. The resource based utilizations trend (Charter & Polonsky, 1999) is driven by increased costs for handling of bi-products as well as by values held by a younger environmentally aware generation that is reaching powerful corporate positions (Hollender & Fenichell, 2004).

Socioeconomic development

We have never known more about health than we do today (Jacobsson, 2004) – and yet the perception of lacking health is greater than ever. Consumers know what he or she ought to eat and how he or she should live – but he or she does not do this. Why? One explanation is how consumers perceive health. It is taken for granted until the contrary is a fact. Another explanation is raised expectations of good health, even as we reach a mature age. These expectations legitimize a societal debate over where the line is between what is private and not. It becomes acceptable for the government to differentiate the taxation on food with reference to how healthy it is (Seppänen, 2004; Höjgård, 2005) which leads to increased development health related foods for a large market, above and beyond the already health conscientious consumer segment.

Proactive corporate strategies show an awareness of the needs of their most important resource, their employees. This is reflected in a subsidized health related work program with sports, healthy food and a manageable workload. In the long run, an attractive work offer will provide not only productive any loyal employees but also a good image that will attract future employees.

Our future carriers of societal responsibilities are in day-care now. They are in the school system for some 10-15 years to come. That is where the truly strategic resources are aimed. Healthy habits with regards to food, work and every day life are grounded in these years. These habits are also manifested and supported in good school lunches that are free from charge and no soda or candy machines². These investments will lead to a good quality-of-life as well as lowered costs for healthcare.

The world is shrinking as the world is brought to us through imports. Consumers are exposed to a rich variety of products from all parts of the world. It refers to exiting exotic products as well as traditional food that are grown locally. Continued terror threats will enter the food arena. Consumers express a need for control and information regarding the way food has been

² While this scenario was composed, action was taken in the UK where the UK health secretary announced that vending machines in schools will not be allowed to sell chocolates, crisps or fizzy drinks from September 2006. France banned vending machines in all schools in 2005, which is estimated to cost the industry 250 million Euro in lost revenues annually. Other countries are expected to follow suit (www, Insight Investor Responsibility , 2006, 1, p.2).



produced. These needs are met through identity tags on individual products along with a computer terminal that can provide all information for each product (Talbot, 2004).

Food for Life 2025 can be summarized in three R:s:

R *esponsibility* – towards nature, present and future generations
esource use - a clear allocation and use of resources
econciation - values and commitment over boundaries

Food for LIFE has many quality dimensions (Barnard, 1993). It is not simply nutrition in an appropriate amount, at an acceptable price and an enjoyable moment of the day. Food is power. The consumer shows an increasing awareness of her power in a purchasing position. It is her chance to express values in terms of local production, environmental awareness and social values (Yong & Welford, 2002). Communication in these areas is complicated and for the most part carried out in symbols (brands, trade marks and certifications) and the future consumers will be ready to find the products that are in agreement with his or her values. Food is not just nutrition – it is joy, work, safety, business and culture – in other words, food is life.

3 CSR 2025

Many companies worldwide in all sectors have realized that their competitive edge has taken a new social dimension with regards to expected roles and output in society (Hollender & Fenichell, 2004). The social role that business may take on, voluntarily, provides a long term perception of a socially responsibly business that is far more important than maximizing financial performance in the short run.

Looking ahead, however, how can these initiatives from a few businesses become the main stream procedure and even an institutionalized expected way of conduct? A historic perspective including a speculated future might help us think of the conditions for the development of favorable CSR conditions.

3.1 CSR history

Looking back at the early 2000 from the time 2025, we wonder, what made it all happen? What were the conditions that promoted the development of CSR? Looking at the gradual awareness curve of CSR, it starts out as “a good thing to do” and it ends up as an institutionalized procedure (Figure 6). Some businesses started from an environmentally and socially thought through foundation that was a part of the business idea, for example, *The Body Shop* and *Ben & Jerry's* (Thayer Robbins, 2001). For most businesses, however, the awareness of social responsibility grew stronger with their own experiences of quality and environmental management systems and communication (Karpesjö, 1992). The awareness was also promoted by the critical eye of researchers and media's exposure of mal practice cases to the public eye. This is especially the case for industries at risk of environmental accidents, such as the energy producing industry, construction industry and large multi international corporations.

CSR awareness

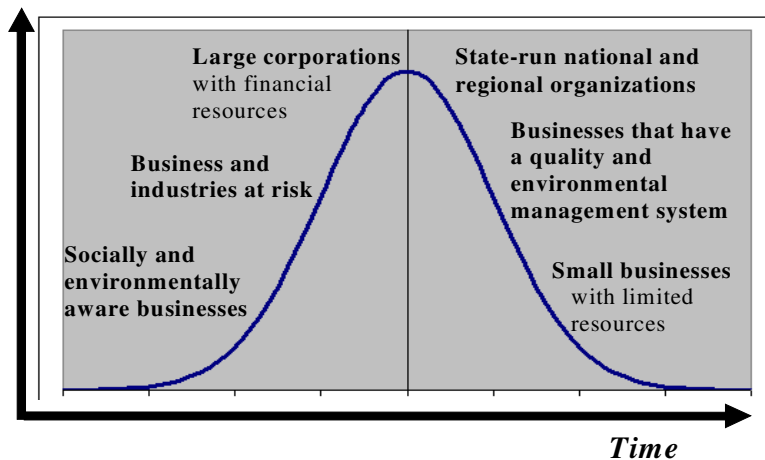


Figure 6. A gradual institutionalization of CSR in corporations and organizations. The awareness curve represents the part of business and organizations that have made CSR programs a part of their conduct. The CSR debate and awareness thus evolve from being issues and problems to business opportunities, and eventually, institutionalized in a legal framework.

Over time, state run organizations gradually embraced the concept of CSR thus establishing that CSR is possible to mould in to not only business concept but to other organizational *raison d'être* as well³. Businesses that had experiences of quality and environmental management systems followed, and CSR gradually became institutionalized, a standard procedure (Brunsson & Jacobsson, 2002) that was expected by stakeholders at large.

This process of institutionalization of CSR in business and state run organizations can be compared to the process of promoting conditions for increased environmental engagement in the previous decades (Dobers, 1995). It was guided through successful projects that lead the way for future development of institutional conditions that promote continued engagement.

3.2 Driving forces in the institutionalization process

CSR and sustainable health systems are significant issues for every business, independent of industrial sector and geographic location. The driving forces for engaging in CSR consist of a variety of interrelated motives (Shaltegger & Buritt, 2005, 201) for example:

- legal compliance
- expectations of increased competitiveness
- an effective risk management
- new business opportunities
- increasing shareholder value

³ A survey by Fair Trade Center among head buyers at municipalities and county councils in Sweden reveals that the purchasing procedures follows financial guidelines strictly. Few ethical considerations are made in comparing one offer to another (2006, Lindström; www, Fair Trade Center, 1, 2006).



- improving corporate reputation and increasing brand values
- maintaining legitimacy and “social licence to operate”
- promoting self-regulation and thus influencing the future
- direction of regulatory frameworks
- the role of corporations s drivers or economic and social development, and last but not least,
- moral commitment of managers and employees.

This list can easily be extended and the debate over what are selfish motives and what are truly altruistic actions can be debated (Pringle & Thompson, 1999) but the fact is that the number of companies that engage socially in one way or another is steadily increasing. Some companies carefully review their own business conduct, which is reported as a part in the annual report or separately, for example in a “social investment report” as in the case of CS Jonhson (www, CS Johnson, 1, 2006) and SAB Miller (www, SAB Miller, 1, 2006). Other companies choose to provide financial means to charities that provide social and health related services, for example Ronald Mc Donald homes (www, Mc Donalds, 1, 2006).

Food business and retailers play an important role in promoting codes of conduct as well as social engagement. Consumers face their output in daily food related purchasing decisions. These decisions are based on needs, financial limitations, habits and ethical standpoints. If consumers are helped along the way through rating systems and symbols of codes of conduct it will provide grounds for a value based differentiation (Young & Welford, 2002).

New business opportunities may refer to strategic R&D management in order to develop new health related food products, such as functional foods (Mark-Herbert, 2002). These products carry added value as well as strategic value in terms of patents and brands. Investment in the development of functional foods is a long term investment, where the gain is not just strictly financial.

The concept of Triple Bottom Line provides routines of reporting in terms of economic, environmental and social issues (Elkinton, 1998). A traditional annual report has thus grown in scope as well as in time perspectives. A short term perspective is represented in most economic reports, whereas environmental and social engagement is reported with expectations of long term payback. It refers to building brands and a company reputation. Independent of time perspective or in what way CSR actions are carried out, companies desire a positive effect from their investment – which leads us to the challenging issue of creating conditions for further development of a CSR culture.

3.3 Supportive conditions for further development of CSR

In the rather optimistic view in the future scenario and the fictive historic illustration (Figure 6) companies play an important role as carriers of social values. It refers to conducting business in a socially responsibly way and for businesses to actively participate in social programs. On a daily basis, it involves making many little decisions that work towards a triple bottom line perception rather than focusing on strictly the financial results, the bottom line. It also involves accepting the creation of a transparent system of measurements and benchmarks



so that others may objectively judge the company's progress towards these triple bottom line objectives.

In order to facilitate the process of institutionalization where CSR becomes the general norm, the standard way of conducting business, there is a need for profound institutional change to address the current food related health care development. In this process, the corporate role can be given priority through supportive institutional conditions. As suggested in the case of environmental institutionalization (Dobers, 1995), allowing for one project to lead to another with shared experiences in-between might allow for a gradual upgrading of the CSR awareness (Hollender & Fenichell, 2004). A starting point might be a multi stakeholder dialogue, a forum where policymakers and business executives are brought together with specialists in different areas to discuss issues as regulation, profitability, taxation and public relations.

Supportive organizations, such as the World Business Council for Sustainable Development - (www, WBCSD, 1, 2006) provide a forum for sharing experiences, organizing political groups of influence, as well as access to expertise in strategic areas. They also actively participate in educational programs for the future generation managers. Some of these supportive organizations, Amnesty, Fair Trade, Green peace, QIII and Swedwatch, may be regarded as "ethical police", but even multi international corporations that have been subjected to their scrutiny agree on the important role that these organizations fill (Nilsson, 2006; Ahlqvist, 2006)).

The driving forces that have motivated companies to engage in CSR so far needs to be further analyzed in order to develop conditions that are favourable for further developments. Social needs and health problems vary and thus the profile of CSR programs will have different profiles. The CSR institutionalization starts with a short time perspective with a given production that leads to as cost- and risk reduction as well as a chase of legitimacy. Over time, the increased willingness to share information in a transparent system leads to collaboration between stakeholders and new triple bottom line objectives (Hart, 2005, 60).

The role for CSR in the Food for Life 2025 scenario is vital. Depending on the institutional conditions that corporations are faced with, they will show a varying degree of engagement in CSR issues. It will take many brave strategic decisions, new alliances and determination in finding new procedures to take into account a triple bottom line. From a corporate perspective, the three R:s of CSR in Food for Life 2025 may be summarized as:

R *e-orientation* – re-thinking the organizational raison d'être
reputation value- corporate image and brands as long term investments
rightfulness – awareness of CSR creates a desire to do the right thing

In working towards what we in 2006 conceive as a sustainable system, we want to keep in mind that in 20 years this might be an upgraded set of objectives. However, "we cannot rely on established governmental structures, technology and science to bring about real change... There is a need for business to engage in a more radical rethink of many of the issues that face society..." (Young & Welford, 2002, 31-32). And what can possibly be more important than food for life?



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