

Social Responsibility Tools Face the Complex Action of Organizations: A Critical Study

Las herramientas de responsabilidad social frente a la acción compleja: un estudio crítico

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Abstract:

The tools that qualify social responsibility tend to define reality and to frame the actions of the individuals that compose them, but they are insufficient in situations that the individual declares as complex and in which they must act responsibly. Considering that ethics and morals are the basis of corporate social responsibility in this article, we carry out a critical study of social responsibility tools in the face of complex action.

Keywords:

Ethics, structuration theory, complexity theory, social responsibility tools

Resumen:

Las herramientas que califican la responsabilidad social tienden a definir la realidad y a encuadrar las acciones de los individuos que las componen, pero se muestran insuficientes en situaciones que el individuo declara como complejas y en las cuales debe de actuar responsablemente. Considerando que la ética y la moral son la base de la responsabilidad social empresarial en el presente artículo realizamos un estudio crítico de las herramientas de responsabilidad social frente a la acción compleja.

Palabras Clave:

Ética, Moral, Teoría de la estructuración, Teoría de la complejidad, Herramientas de responsabilidad social

Introduction

The social responsibility of organizations is based on ethics, the common good and the care of the environment, in fact, being stricter and focusing on action, the last two elements are also derived from ethics.

The idea of approaching ethics with action comes from Aristotle, who affirmed that only in action can the wisdom and ethics of individuals be demonstrated, moving away from the later moral ideas that guide the action of individuals, such as of the categorical imperative of Kant, which indicate that moral rules are universal and must be established in the very structure of any social organization. Currently business organizations have become fashionable to obtain social responsibility badges, showing that the actions carried out within their organizations follow criteria such as environmental care, human rights, community development, work development, among others.

Thus, the guide that social responsibility tools show seems to offer us answers to an increasingly unequal, poor world with environmental problems guiding the actions of the

individuals that make them up. As well as an increase in complexity, especially in action, where not only new situations arise but opposite or perverse effects that affect the objectives of both individuals and organizations.

The questions that will guide this communication, which is a process of reflection and criticism, are: should social responsibility be guided by a tool that measures, evaluates and controls individuals by defining their reality? Or should the individuals that make up the organizations behave ethically by solving the paradoxes that emerge in the action?

In order to answer these questions, we will base ourselves on Giddens' structuring theory and we will make it discuss with the theory of complexity to make a critique of the tools of social responsibility, positioning ourselves in a constructivist epistemology.

Thus, this article is composed of the following parts: The first part clarifies the constructivist epistemological position that we assume and the methodology with which we carry out this article of reflection.

The second part refers to the theoretical framework starting with the discussion between ethics, morality and action which we establish as the main basis of social

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responsibility; We continue with a review of structuring theory, emphasizing the relationship between structure and action; finally, we describe social responsibility and the most used tools in Mexico.

The third part is devoted to a process of reflection beginning with the management tools and their role in organizations where we emphasize the general characteristics to later discuss the tools of social responsibility; later we discussed the complexity of the action in the organizations and the role of individual.

Finally, we end with a discussion between ethics, structure and complex action and the role played by social responsibility tools.

Methodology

Epistemological position

Before establishing the methodology followed in this work, we will highlight the importance of clarifying the epistemological position. This importance lies in the fact that management is currently dominated by a positivist framework [1] which has given certain characteristics to management tools such as those used for social responsibility.

The fact is completely clarified by P. Lorino [2] when establishing that the management tools oriented and created under positivist assumptions tend to define the organizational reality. Indeed, we must ask ourselves if social responsibility should be guided by a tool that measures, evaluates and controls individuals by defining their reality? Or are the individuals who must behave ethically in all their actions resolving the paradoxes that emerge in the action?

To answer these questions, we have taken a constructivist epistemological position, that is, starting from the assumption that individuals only obtain knowledge by acting. In other words, we situate ourselves in the theories of action.

It is noteworthy that constructivism starts from literature to go to the field of research and then return to literature, seeking to create knowledge-oriented action [3]. This communication is in the first phase, in the review of the literature where the assumptions that subsequently have to be tested repeatedly in the field arise.

Constructivist methodology

Once the epistemological position has been clarified, it is time to establish the methodology that has been followed, which, as mentioned above, is based on the literature-field of research-literature cycle.

In our case, an extensive literature review on social responsibility, complexity theory, structuring theory, ethics in action, management tools and constructivist epistemology was carried out. Carrying out a critical

dialogue to understand the situation that maintains ethics and social responsibility in organizations and following an abductive logic as David Brand [4].

In this case we do not present hypotheses that have to be verified in the positivist way, but assumptions that must be proven in the action within the field of investigation.

Theoretical framework

Ethics, morals and action as a basis for social responsibility

To establish the basis of social responsibility we start from the fact that the human being is a social being. There are historical evidences of different cultures on how to carry out such social interaction, for example, the philosophers of ancient Greece discussed common welfare, ethics and morals as the basis of the social.

Although, throughout history there have been many discussions on ethics and morality with philosophers such as: Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine, Hobbes, Kant, etc. Our interest is to link these concepts with action, especially in individual action.

For Aristotle [5] ethics was above all a philosophy of action, based on reflection and on the aims pursued by such action. Locating it in an ethical not only normative, that is, oriented in the means to achieve the ends, but largely descriptive of the individual who is doing it. Morality then remains in the normative part, fixed by external members to the individual, who guide him in his social interaction.

Aristotle's point of view helps us identify two elements in recursive interaction with each other, the first is the individual and its action, and the second is the society that establishes the rules and norms of behaviour. In matters of temporality, the first element is faster and fleeting, representing ethics, the second is slower and permanent, representing morality.

It is noteworthy that in the face of the immediacy of certain actions there is a problem that makes the individual have no time to reflect on the outcome of their actions or the purpose of their actions. This problem of the individual, Aristotle brand, is solved by experience, which through a posteriori reflection of the acts and results gives the actor wisdom, sharing with this the ideas of Varela [6] that indicates that ethics is very close to wisdom.

In addition, in the action the individual can face paradoxes, which are defined as "the existence of different, interdependent and contradictory elements that exist simultaneously and persist over time" [7, p. 382]. Given these circumstances, according to Valera [6], the individual, who is a builder of his own world, faces a micro-rupture of his routine, which forces him to reflect ethically. With this we imply that ethical action is rarely presented with respect to routine actions.

Thus, ethics does not arise from habits, from routines or from obedience to moral rules that frame the action of the individual [6], but from a reflection in.

In the case of the structure, it is observed that it is composed of both resources, which allow the organization to carry out its activities, as well as rules, that is: rules, procedures and any other device that allows the actions of the organizations to be framed. actors that make up the organization. Thus, through these two elements, the structure enables action.

The action is part of the organization. In fact, another definition of organization is the concept of a system, which necessarily involves a dynamism - action - both in its internal processes and in the import and export of energy, in other words, an organization or system necessarily involves action [10].

The problem of action in the organization is that not necessarily all the members of the organization act, if they do not necessarily seek objectives aligned to the organization, it is even to note that most of the time they act by routine [9]. Thus, it is observed that there are few times that the actor makes a reflection prior to the action [11], which we will call anticipation, which is also characterized by having an objective and by the elaboration of an assumption (hypothesis) of the result.

This problem is emphasized if we consider that the results or intentions after the action can create undesired effects for the actors, for the organization or for external members of the organization [12].

Noting then that the action involves a complexity by itself, not only at the level of cognition of the actors [13] also by the effects that can cause the system [14], by the number of elements in interaction, the non-linear dynamics of the system, the emergence of new features [15], etc.

On the other hand, it is important to point out that the structure plays a double role since it guides and limits the action, frames it so that the objectives of the organization are achieved and restricts, by its resources and rules, the individuals who want to carry out actions outside of what the structure marks.

For its part, the action, which in the organization becomes complex and dynamic, in the face of the news and emergencies of the organization or due to the will or change of objectives of its members, requires or obliges to make changes in the structure.

Thus, a recursive phenomenon is created between the two elements, action and structure. For example: if the organization maintains a strict control of the action, due to the rules, norms or procedures, the actors tend to look for ways in how to avoid such controls, in other words, the standardization created by the structure paradoxically emerges new forms to act [16].

Social responsibility and its tools

The industry, since the industrial revolution, has been transformed by improving its performance and its speed does not generate a negative impact on society and the environment. Faced with this situation, the so-called tools

that measure social responsibility emerge, which are based on the logic of measure-control-improve from classical administration [2].

Although there are various tools that determine whether a company or organization is socially responsible, we will analyse three management tools most used in Mexico by companies:

- The first tool used by the Mexican Center for Philanthropy (CEMEFI), which awards the ESR (Socially Responsible Company) badge.
- The ISO 26000 standard, which certifies the company through the international standardization organization.
- The proposal by the OECD (organization for cooperation and economic development) that measures companies in their activities to consider them as socially responsible companies.

The main characteristics of these tools are summarized in Table 1. Where we observe that each one defines social responsibility differently, integrating more or less categories and classifications.

As noted, the categories are broad and varied, ranging from human rights, such as consumer or worker rights, the rights of the communities with which they interact, such as tax compliance or community development, and protection environment. Noting that they qualify the results of the actions carried out by the group of people that make up the company.

In turn, each category presented must have a series of indicators that allow quantifying the performance of companies by determining a scale aimed at rating the situation of the company. Thus, these tools require that the actors of the organization carry out actions and present evidence to show that they comply with the indicators and with defined categories. This, obviously, requires the definition of concepts, processes, rules and norms that as a whole guide the action of individuals.

Finally, through an audit process, the corresponding bodies, depending on the evaluating organization selected by the company, decide whether the organization in its general action is proceeding in a responsible manner before society.

Thus, in general, social responsibility tools follow the logic of measuring to control, control to improve that requires the establishment of a quantitative scale of each action of the company.

Reflections

Management tools and their role in organizations

In this section we will establish the paradoxes generated by the management tools in the action. This will help us to clarify how the action can become complex, especially in the interpretation of the individuals who face it.

Thus, defining tool as a tool adapted to a specific process that allows to intentionally transform an object [17], we will go into depth in the management tools to later focus on the tools of social responsibility.

It is important to establish that a tool in general has the following characteristics:

a) It is oriented to action. The tools serve to facilitate the action of a task that is going to be repeated continuously.
b) They are cognitive shortcuts. The designer of the tool has set in motion his capacity of conception in front of a determined problem, in this case the user is in charge only of applying it. The cognitive difficulty arises in the learning of the tool, later, in its use it becomes routine reason why the cognitive reflection of the user disappears.

c) It is influenced by paradigms. Remember that paradigms define, in a part of history, the correct way of thinking, which includes the use of tools [18].

In the case of management tools, where social responsibility tools are included, the following characteristics are also available:

a) They tend to standardize and control the action. Being designed for action, enough management tools establish the procedures to be followed, the measurements to be made, the acceptable limits of action and even the punishments or awards to be granted based on the performance obtained at the end of the action.

b) They define the organizational reality. When the management tool tends to catalog the results of the action, it directly carries out the definition of reality at the organizational level. This in some cases works as a cognitive shortcut. That is, the individual does not strive to define reality, the tool defines it by him.

Each of the previous points generates its opposites, which we can establish as follows:

- Although the tools are oriented to action, the appropriation of the individual is required.
- Although tools are cognitive shortcuts, they do not represent the knowledge that individuals possess.
- The problems or situations in which the tools are applied have a cognitive bias and a preference in their use derived from the current paradigm, limiting creative imagination and innovation.
- While tools standardize and control, individuals in the action seek, either positively or negatively for the objectives of the organization, to create new forms of action.
- Although in certain epistemological paradigms, such as the positivist, tools define reality, in other paradigms, such as the constructivist, reality can only be defined by the actors in action.

It is important to point out that management is currently dominated by a paradigm that strengthens the division of labour. This paradigm directly impacts the management tools, especially those that measure social responsibility,

where we identify three types of actors: The designers, who define the reality of the organization and establish the rules on which a company can.

Conclusions

Ethics, structure and complex action

Every organization is structuring and structured [9]. In other words, a structure is created to allow and guide the action and in an emergent way and with the passage of time, the action modifies the structure.

It is important to note that most of the time the action is routine [11], not only because it gives ontological security to the actor, but because it limits his reflective processes through the law of minimum effort. Thus the routine has as characteristic the actor's lack of reflection, which can easily justify his acting.

The structure helps to direct routine actions. In the company we observe it in the standardization, in the use of the tools, in the norms and policies, etc. But there are also actions that are considered outside the routine, for example: learning, interaction with new actors or the emergence of new situations. It is in this rupture of the routine where the actor must show the ethics of his action [6].

Thus, morality is part of the structure of the organization, limiting and enabling action, while ethics is part of the individual's own actions, no matter where they are.

In effect, the difference between ethics and morals is explained by several authors, among them Aristotle or Varela [6], who use action to differentiate them. This has a direct impact with the tools that assess social responsibility within organizations given that:

a) The tools are themselves carriers of reality, that is, they qualify the action directly impacting the structure and not the action itself.

b) The actors must respond to the structure in their routine, so there is no cognitive effort, only the derivative of initial learning, so organizations that are qualified as socially responsible are not necessarily integrated by ethical individuals, which presenting actions outside the routine do not know how to act ethically.

c) The complexity of the action necessarily creates paradoxes that the individual must face, these paradoxes are inevitably born out of the routine. In the case of social responsibility tools, they do not contemplate said paradoxes [7].

Therefore, although the tools of social responsibility help to guide the individual in the action, these are insufficient in front of the need of ethical individuals. So it is important to consider them as cognitive aids and not as elements that define the organizational reality, remember that the action is complex.

Thus, if you really want a social change you need to promote ethics and teach the complex effects of action in organizations, it may be more convenient to eliminate rules and promote more culture and ethics, or in the words of E. Morin [22].: "To teach to live".

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