

Communicating Corporate Social Responsibility – Brand management

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Abstract

Corporate action is subject to more scrutiny than ever. An attempt to legitimize the corporate role is seen in corporate social responsibility as a part of a triple bottom line framework. Corporate principles are communicated in various forms to a wide set of stakeholders. Ideally, what is communicated in terms of principles is also seen in business practice. In cases where the principles and actions differ, the platform for creating a brand territory is limited. The communication platform is affected by, for example, corporate documents, actions and media perceptions. The studied cases, from the construction industry, illustrate how media portrays business conduct. It shows that the corporate communication strategy is affected by media's verdicts. Driven by outside pressure, a set of ethical principles were declared but they received little attention since their press release was poorly timed; the press release coincided with a scandal of unethical business conduct concerning the same company. Branding represents a cornerstone in the corporate marketing umbrella. It is a simplifying symbol that helps stakeholders distinguish between sales offers. Credence values such as social responsibility and ethical business conduct are intangible; the brand thus becomes a guarantee for the communicated social values.

Keywords

CSR, brand management, communication, construction business, marketing

Introduction

"Business is not divorced from the rest of society. How companies behave affects many people, not just shareholders. A company should be a responsible member of the society in which it operates" (Internet, World Business Council for Sustainable Development, 1, 2006).

Businesses and their role in society are subject to more intense scrutiny than ever. What is the main purpose of a company's existence? Is it simply to maximize profits in order to satisfy the owners' requests and demands, or is it possible to see the company in a larger perspective in society? Should this perspective go beyond pure financial aspects of the activities? The quotation above refers to the ongoing debate about corporate responsibility. Besides being a profitable business, the responsibility of a company can, for example, be connected to programs for fair treatment of employees, using sustainable environmental friendly methods and participating actively in discussions about ethical social dilemmas (Löhman & Steinholz, 2003; Philipson, 2004). It is a discussion about how companies choose to do business, solely with financial objectives or in a responsible way that might affect the financial return, supporting other values.

The ongoing debate concerning the role of the businesses in the community is an expression of expanded corporate responsibilities referred to as CSR, corporate social responsibility, or CR, Corporate Responsibility (Löhman & Steinholz, 2003). There is no one universally accepted definition (Whitehouse, 2006), but a number of organizations and companies have their own interpretation of CSR. The European Union states the following about the definition of CSR:

"CSR is a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis" (Internet, EU 1, 2006).

CSR is regarded as a part of the "triple bottom line", a concept that was coined by Elkinton (1998) in which sustainability is built on financial, environmental and social grounds. Working actively with

CSR by taking actions in favour of maintaining the balance between these three values is not regulated by laws; it is a voluntary initiative (Hollender & Fenichell, 2004; Mbare, 2004; Löhman & Steinholz, 2003).

Despite the increased focus on corporate responsibility, the question of the business community's role in society is not a new phenomenon. Companies have always been a part of society, but their role and responsibilities have become somewhat unclear, leaving room for individual interpretations of private and public domains (Henriques & Richardson, 2004; Löhman & Steinholz, 2003). There are presently a number of multinational corporations acting all over the world in the spirit of the globalization trend (Arnold, 1993; Internet, CSRwire 1, 2004; Löhman & Steinholz, 2003; Michael, 2003). The 100 largest economies in the world today are represented by only 50 countries; the rest are multinational corporations (Foley, 2003, 5; Veres, 2001).

An increased awareness and focus of the responsibilities of a corporation gives the business communities the opportunity to be important and powerful actors in society (Nilsson, 2005; Ruggie, 2002). Companies are encouraged to actively work with CSR. But it is not only an opportunity given to the companies; it is also in many cases expectation by customers, employees, society and other stakeholders.

This article illustrates how corporate responsibility is integrated in credible brand management, assuming that business needs to "walk the talk" as well as "chalk the walk", in other words communicate their corporate responsibility conduct. The challenge lies in communicating corporate values expressed in strategies and every day procedures to stakeholders with a variety of interests and expectations (Whitehouse, 2006).

This project is based on a case study of one of the largest construction companies in Sweden, Skanska (von Schantz, 2005). The objective of the case study is to provide an empirical picture of how a large corporation handles communication of CSR issues. The empirical picture is built on how CSR-related news regarding Skanska appears in media.

Enacting verbal communication

“For most companies, the question is not whether to communicate but rather what to say, to whom, and how often” (Kotler, 2003, 563). “Companies are concerned with their customers and it is about time they treated society as a whole in the same manner.” (Veludo-de-Oliveria, 2006, 26).

These quotes suggest that it is not a question of whether or not to communicate, for companies today. It is a question of how to communicate. Integrated corporate communication refers to the fact that a company sends “a message” to a wide set of stakeholders with everything it does (Arnold, 1993; Best, 2004; Löhman & Steinholz, 2003). Business cards, letters, homepages, the way the employees are headed, the way customers are treated - it is all a part of how business is conducted. The business conduct with regards to CSR matters is included (Hollender & Fenichell, 2004; Maignan & Ferrell, 2004; Löhman & Steinholz, 2003; Internet CSRwire, 2005).

Socially mature businesses lead the way for incorporating CSR principles in business conduct. Socially active companies, like the Body Shop and Ben & Jerry’s, have been pioneers in the work and communication of CSR (Hollender & Fenichell, 2004; Mbare, 2004; Thayer Robins, 2001). Large corporations have followed in their footsteps; McDonalds (Nilsson, 2005) has implemented social and environmental programs, for example, promoting fish conservation, and Unilever has started programs by including references about human rights in its business principles (Takala, 1996).

The question of how CSR is communicated is a research area still to be explored (Lindfeldt, 2006; Maignan & Ferrell, 2004; Takala, 1996). Even businesses with a clearly unsustainable business idea, such as the oil and petroleum industry, make efforts in communicating awareness of sustainability issues (Doane, 2004, 82). An example is Shell’s communication in their advertisement campaign: “Profits and Principles. Is there a choice?” (Maignan & Ferrell, 2004). In an attempt to create an awareness of a socially responsible profile, British Petroleum changed its name to BP and marketed the tagline “Beyond Petroleum” to emphasize its commitment to the search for environmentally sustainable alternatives in the energy sector (Ibid.). These examples of corporate efforts to communicate ethical stands, based on a rather thin approach, are labelled as

transactional CSR (Palazzo & Richter, 2005). Businesses with a more sustainable business idea, such as construction, may operate on a more sustainable basis, with so called transformational CSR (Ibid.). Regardless of the basis for the business, ethical principles are communicated. However, the old expression “all publicity is good publicity” is no longer valid in today’s harsh competitive markets (Aperia & Back, 2004). Getting publicity and being in focus because of a neglecting attitude towards CSR issues is hardly a situation a company wants to face. Communication thus becomes an important part in ensuring future business (Charter & Polonsky, 1999).

Stakeholders in a dialogue

CSR communication is still an area to be explored (Maignan & Ferrell, 2004; Takala, 1996). The relevant partners in a CSR dialogue need to be identified in order to provide grounds for investment in CSR conduct and a meaningful continued dialogue. These partners, sometimes labelled senders and receivers, are referred to collectively as stakeholders (Maignan & Ferrell, 2004), sometimes with a division in primary, indispensable, and secondary, supportive stakeholders (Whitehouse, 2006).

Internal and external stakeholders (Figure 1) are mutually dependant on one another, presented in relation to the company, illustrated as the gray circle in the middle. Internal stakeholders are a part of, and heavily dependant on, daily operations that limit a company’s relative strengths and weaknesses on a market. The external stakeholders constitute the framework of the company that may affect the company’s opportunities and threats.

Traditionally, companies have paid more attention to their internal stakeholders, in particular the shareholders (or stockholders), than to the rest of the stakeholders (Kotler, 2000). The term shareholder refers to the owners of the company, stressing the financial aspects, the bottom line, of a company performance within a particular time frame (Lazonick & O’Sullivan, 2000, 13). The term “stakeholders” signifies a wider perspective in terms of meeting expectations and the time frame to do so. A traditional and brief list of stakeholders, besides the shareholders, could be consumers, workers, investors, suppliers, distributors, host communities, media, general society and world ecological community (Deetz, 1995, 50-51). These stakeholders’

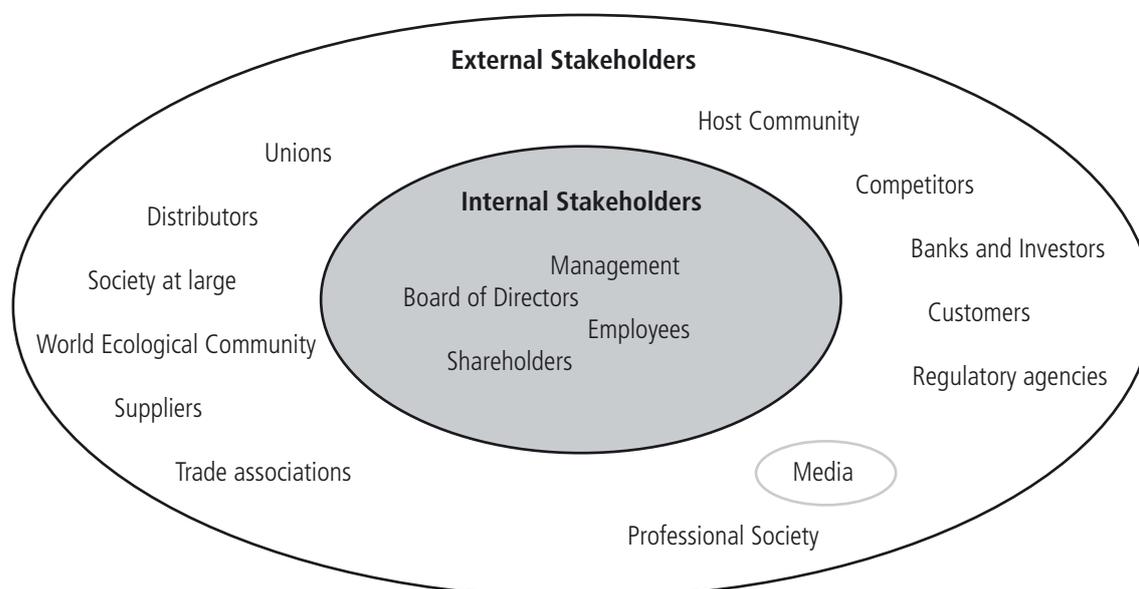


Figure 1. An example of a model for external and internal stakeholders of a company (inspiration from Deetz 1995, 50-51).

demands and expectations may imply conflicting needs and interests. Companies that strive to satisfy the needs of the different groups of stakeholders will meet a cumbersome challenge. One way of addressing this issue is to group stakeholders with similar interests (authorities, business partners, financial actors, external influence and customer groups) to accommodate to each group's interests (Dowling, 2001).

Among the external stakeholders, media deserves particular attention. What is portrayed in media will influence internal as well as other external stakeholders that in their turn may affect others. Their role can be seen as ambassadors of messages and opinions (Thorstenson, 2006). If a message or an opinion is stated by a strong ambassador, a trustworthy person, it is more likely that the word carries beyond the primary reader. The effect can be compared to ripples on a body of water.

Communication – creating an image

Communication is defined as the process by which information is transmitted and understood between two or more parties (McShane & Von Glinow, 2003). The communicational aspects of an organization have become an increasingly important strategic issue; emphasizing that communication must be effectively adjusted for the intended target group (Larsson, 1997).

Communication can be described as information flows through various channels between a sender and a receiver, including confirmation of a message and elements of disturbance in the process (Nitsch, 1998; Shannons & Weaver, 1949). The communication process thus implies that what a company "says" (brand character, an image) is not always what is perceived by the receiver (consumer insights, a profile) or based in product characteristics (Figure 2).

In the model (Figure 2), the desired image is supported through active communication. Senders and receivers of information create a picture that is labelled profile. Senders of information may include any stakeholder, sharing information. The communication also includes non-verbal messages such as

pictures, logos and symbols. There are a number of barriers in a communication process, sometimes referred to as noise. Differences in perceptions, filtering, cultures, languages, distortion in perspective and the information overload are all examples of communication barriers (McShane & Von Glinow, 2003). Perceptions of product characteristics refer to consumer's experience of the product in question. The intersecting area in Figure 2 of characteristics, profile and image is labelled territory. It refers to a coinciding perception of values – in other words a shared perception of what the brand promises and of the product experience. A large territory (Garriga & Melé, 2004; Pringle and Thompson, 1999) would thus serve as an ideal basis to build a communication platform.

The classical communication platforms to build a brand are advertising, sales promotion, public relations and publicity as well as personal contacts where the primary aim is to maximize the surface that leads to increased sales (Kotler, 2003; Kotler et al., 1999). This is a rather short-sighted and narrow perception of communication. An alternative way of describing the different communication platforms is to talk about communication options (Keller, 2001) with a wider set of goals for what the communication aims at and a longer time perspective to do so (Henriques & Richardson, 2004; Thorstenson, 2006). The key point is that the sender of a message must make active choices in communications and evaluate the outcome in a long term perspective, above and beyond sales statistics to establish a solid territory for building a corporate image.

The phenomenon of branding is not new in the business community, but the awareness of its strategic value has developed considerably (Arnold, 1993; Kay, 2006; Keller, 2001; Riezebos, 2003). All organizations and industrial actors are judged by their "corporate marketing umbrella", where the brand serves as one cornerstone in communication (Balmer & Greysner, 2006). The definition of a brand is "a name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of these, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or a group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors" (Keller, 1998, 37). The

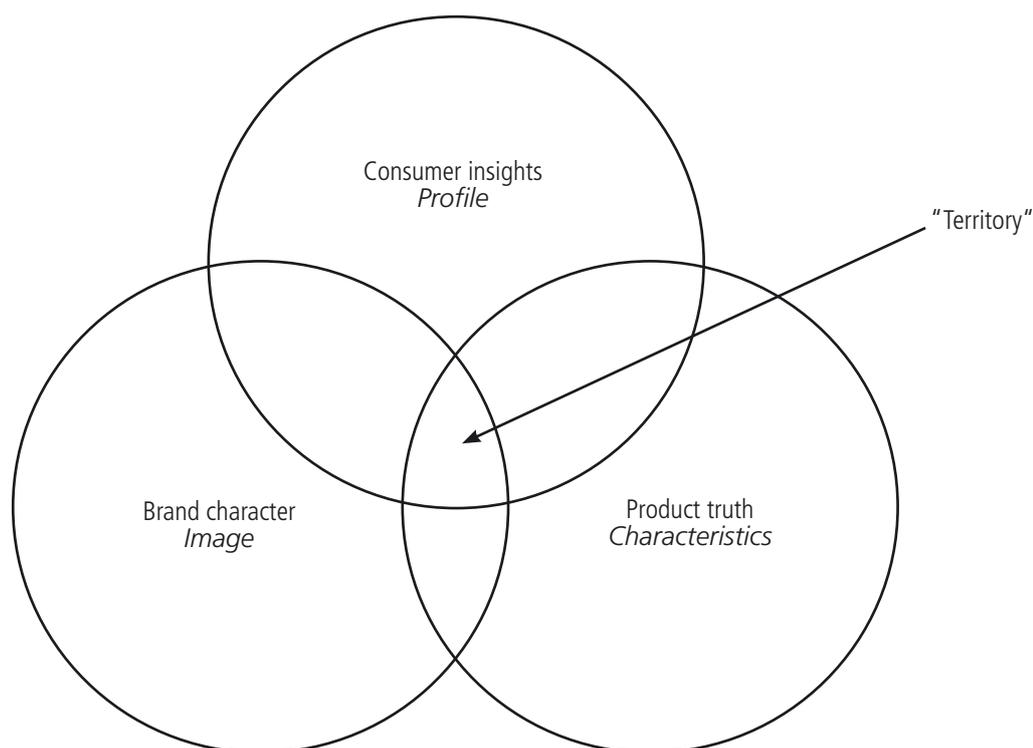


Figure 2. The term "territory" explains the common grounds for perceptions of a brand (Pringle and Thompson, 1999, 155, with additions). In positioning a brand, the ideal situation is a large territory, which from a consumer perspective refers to a brand that provides the anticipated values.

basic function of a brand is to help the customer identify the suppliers and simplify the selection among the multiple choices on a market. This way of explaining the function of a brand is regarded to be a mechanical aspect of product differentiation and an extended way of describing the function of a brand is to explain it as a personality of a product (Figure 3), making the customers emotionally attached and loyal to the company (Arnold, 1993).

ages and continue to be a respected part of the Swedish business community (Internet, BI, 2004; Nilsson, 2007). Ethical rules have been formulated and many construction companies are working with CSR issues, but the question of how to successfully communicate the CSR approach remains unsolved. The statement below stresses the importance of the question of communication.

“Business cannot hope to enjoy concrete benefits from CSR

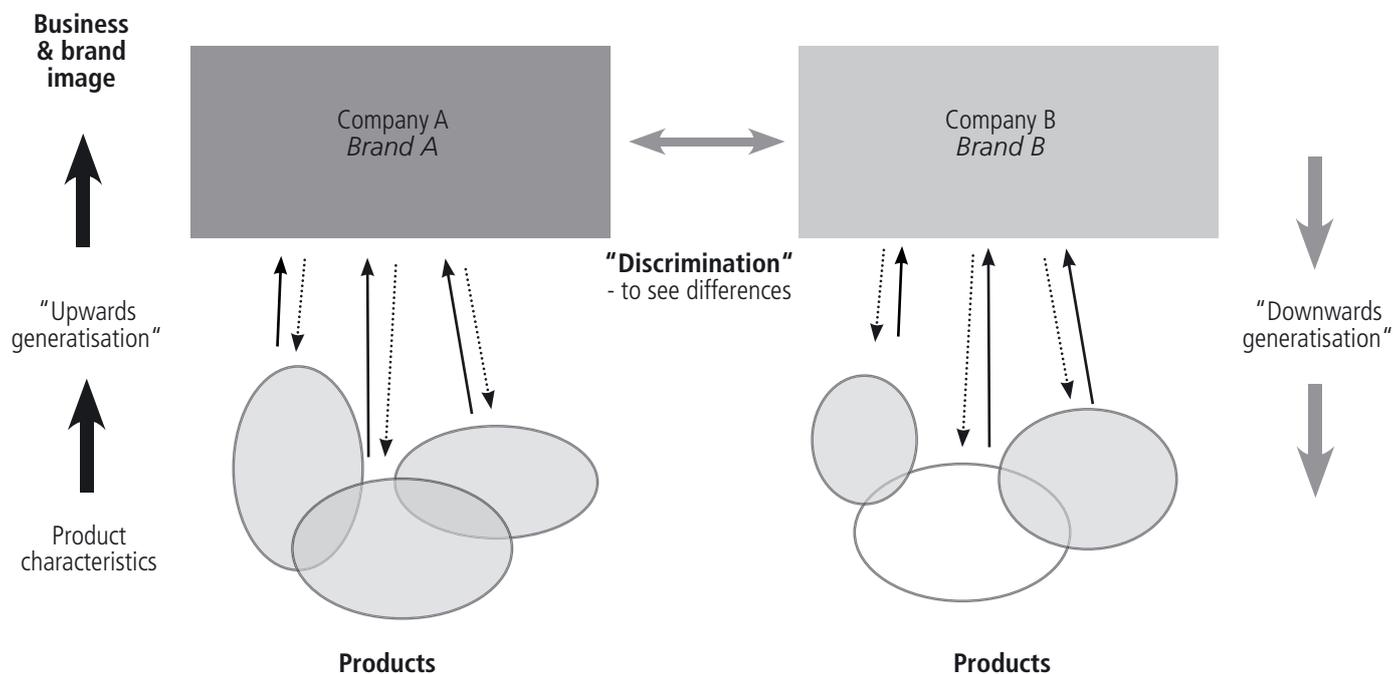


Figure 3. A brand and company name is a carrier of strategic value. The value of the brand and the company name is based on customers' previous experiences that are generalized (Mark-Herbert, 2004, 6).

The function of a brand in Figure 3 illustrates the fact that stakeholders make generalizations based on perceived communication and previous experiences (Mark-Herbert, 2004). The upward and downward generalization in the figure refers to how customers associate the brand of the company with the experience they have with a product. Likewise, in the downwards generalization the customer connect the company name and brand to expectations of a product. A negative product experience will affect the perception of the brand in a negative way, while a positive experience will support a good perception of a company and a brand. Discrimination between brands and experiences refers to separating different product offers, supported by brand and company names - to see the differences.

The brand serves as a symbol for the profile, which in the best of cases, coincides with the desired image. When the product offer is hard to evaluate, the brand may serve as a guarantee, based on previous experiences and a general company profile. Stakeholders thus rely on the information that is communicated through a brand. The brand as such is "charged" positively or negatively in communication among stakeholders. A strong brand is desirable, but it is also vulnerable to influential stakeholders' negative verdict.

An empirical study - Approach

In recent years, the construction sector in Sweden has been fighting a reputation of doubtful business ethics (von Schantz, 2005). The sector is presently working actively to improve im-

unless they intelligently communicate about their initiatives to relevant stakeholders" (Maignan & Ferrell, 2004, 17).

The general awareness of CSR in society has gradually increased (Internet, CSRwire, 2005). Media keeps the debate in the public domain and ethical investors and financiers are seeking more information and raising their expectations progressively (Bengtsson, 2005 A & B; Mbare, 2004). The construction sector, in Sweden, is no exception. Recent history and reputation leaves the sector no other choice but working with and communicating a serious approach towards CSR issues.

In this study, communication refers to what the media portrays in terms of CSR issues for our focal company. The object is to provide a model for how the media coverage affects the corporate image in terms of a brand. The case study is briefly presented in this article as an illustration and the full version is available in von Schantz (2005).

The Skanska Group is a large multinational construction business with their roots in Sweden (Internet, Skanska 1, 2006). It is portrayed in terms of CSR issues in the press as being active in a construction sector faced with many CSR related problems and with a corporate history of bad publicity. A recent scandal, in 2005, was an extensive use of cartels in the construction industry. As many as 46% of the managers in the study admitted to knowing of cartels in their business, which reinforces the notion of poor ethical conduct in general (Nordgren, 2005). Skanska was not found guilty of being a part of the cartel in 2005, but similar problems are a part of Skanska's history, thus a motive for taking the issues of responsible conduct seriously.

Despite the fact that Skanska has worldwide operations (Davidson, 2004), this study has been limited to the activities in recent years on the Swedish market in order to give CSR issues one cultural setting.

The other actor of particular interest in this study is media. Relevant media has been selected from the daily business press published in Sweden and is represented by the two largest news papers: Svenska Dagbladet (SvD) and Dagens Nyheter (DN), as well as the largest daily business news paper, Dagens Industri (DI). The selected papers cover the major business activities in Sweden and the articles from the papers are available in databases. Other media, such as radio and TV, have not been examined due to the complexity in collecting data. The data collected from articles in the newspapers are published in the year of 2001 to 2003 since the chosen research area is of increasing novelty and current interest.

In constructing a case, interviews and articles about CSR have been the primary empirical sources. Throughout the process the empirical picture has been modified and validated in a continuous analysis (Kvale, 1997). In this process, qualitative rigor has been achieved through numerous confirming interviews with relevant stakeholders (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) and careful documentation that provides grounds for a rich and detailed empirical picture (Stake, 1994, 242).

The Skanska case

The Skanska AB corporation, with over 60,000 employees all over the world, has many closely related actors that may be considered stakeholders of the company. Based on the empirical material (von Schantz, 2005), examination of reports and interviews, it is fair to state that Skanska has obtained insight about being an actor in the micro- and macro- environment of the company. Representatives of the company talk about the traditional stakeholder groups: employees, the financial market, costumers, competitors, the industry, suppliers, decision makers, politicians and potential employees. Skanska takes an active role in national and international forums by participating in different industry related events, such as the development of the "Business Principles for Countering Bribery in the Engineering & Construction Industry", an initiative taken by the industry presented at the World Economic Forum 2004.

Before discussing the present sustainability approach at Skanska further, let us take a look at the history that has promoted the development of CSR policies. Table 1 describes the

development in terms of major CSR-related incidents concerning Skanska. It includes the effects of unfavourable media coverage of Skanska during, for example, the toxic scandal of Hallandsåsen, in 1997, a large project where toxic construction material, Rocagil, was used as a sealant in tunnel construction. Internal stakeholders at Skanska, in strategic roles as well as in operational, had an understanding of the difficulties that might be encountered by a large project, such as the Hallandsåsen project. The procedures that Skanska worked along were well established and the construction material had never previously shown this magnitude of environmental effects. The external stakeholders' insight in Skanska's conduct and societal role, on the other hand, was less informed and heavily dependant on the profile portrayed by media.

A brief glance at Table 1 gives the same effect that media coverage gave Skanska on a larger scale. The occurrences marked with bold text in the table catch the reader's attention much the same way in which the media portrayed problematic incidents to a broad range of stakeholders. The grounds for corporate profile are unbalanced, giving the negative verdicts much attention whereas the positive news receives less attention.

In the early 1990s environmental and CSR issues were not pronounced on the agenda in Skanska (von Schantz, 2005). The Hallandsåsen scandal, in 1997, stimulated top management to consider environmental and social aspects of business conduct, but no official commitments were made at that time. Environmental issues were handled in the Environmental Unit at the main office (1999). The notion of the triple bottom line gradually grew in terms of environmental consideration through a benchmarking process with industrial partners that had faced major environmental issues.

As the awareness process continued, a sustainability unit at the main office was founded in 2001, and that very year Skanska proudly presented their Code of Conduct. However this was also the year that the asphalt cartel was exposed by media where Skanska appeared as suspects in an extensive cartel. Working with ethical behaviour by formulating an ethical code and, at the same time, figuring as a suspect in an illegal tangle is a tremendous message collision to the internal as well as the external stakeholders. Media was merciless – they did not buy in to the declared principles, since they clearly were not implemented. As a result, the credibility, reputation and Skanska brand were badly damaged.

Since the scandal in 2001, Skanska has worked actively with ethical aspects of business conduct. The construction industry as a whole has struggled with image problems which indicate that being "aware of CSR" could be competitive advantage for Skanska. Skanska has chosen to talk about sustainability issues instead of CSR and include the social, environmental and financial values in their definition of sustainability. This makes CSR and sustainability synonymous according to the definition of CSR used in this study (the European Union's definition of CSR).

In 2002, Skanska released their first Sustainability Report where their code of conduct was made public (Internet, Skanska 1, 2005). It has since become a part of their

Table 1. The development and major occurrences of sustainability milestones at Skanska in the last 10 years (based on von Schantz, 2005, 45 with additions)

1997	The toxic scandal of Hallandsåsen where Skanska is the main contractor. Sustainability issues are being discussed, but with a focus on environmental aspects. As a result, top management makes verbal commitments regarding ethical issues in Skanska.
1999	An Environmental Unit is established at the main office at Skanska.
2000	The notion of sustainability is expanded within the Skanska corporation. Benchmarking of the CSR work at Shell.
2001	The Environmental Unit is renamed as Sustainability Unit at Skanska. A Skanska code of conduct is presented. The asphalt cartel , where a number of construction companies were involved among others Skanska, is exposed in media.
2002	Skanska publish their first Sustainability Report.
2003	Skanska managers participate in an educational program for employees in ethical conduct.
2005	The first ecolabel (Svanen) house is built by Skanska (Bengtsson, 2005, 12)
2006	Skanska is a part of a project that aims to develop an environmental classification of buildings (2005-2007) in collaboration with universities and other construction actors (www, ByggaBoDialogen 1, 2006).

Annual Report (Internet, Skanska annual Report, 2005, 38-43), where environmental and ethical goals are presented as financial and quality-related targets (Ibid, 7). Financial, ethical and environmental achievements and targets are integrated in the report. The social aspects of business conduct are not communicated in detail, only in vague phrases about their societal role: "Skanska has many roles in society – for example as a taxpayer, an employer and a creator of infrastructure and buildings. Skanska also contributes to society by serving as an economic engine" (Internet, Skanska 3, 2005, 43).

Skanska works with "value-based leadership" which includes the involvement of the CEO, Stuart Graham. His policy statements in the Sustainability Reports are perceived by internal stakeholders as supportive intentions of Skanska Code of Conduct (personal message, Wenblad, 2004). In the Annual Report (2005, 2-3) however, the communicated performance measures in the "out perform" program refer to the financial, bottom line.

Discussion - CSR communication in the Skanska case

A sustainability report is in itself no guarantee for a sustainable outcome. Critical voices will argue that "what is good for business is good for society" is not always the case (Doane, 2004). When companies like BAT, British American Tobacco, produced a sustainability report and became a part of the Dow Jones Sustainability Index, it was seen as an oxymoron. Their outcome, tobacco products, in themselves are not a part of sustainability. The construction industry as such will never suffer from this kind of criticism. Construction is needed as a part of a sustainability framework where the earth has to support a growing population. But, business conduct may still be criticized.

The Swedish construction sector has suffered from doubtful reputation and is repeatedly in the focus of public debates. Even people from inside of the sector are openly witnessing of poor ethical conduct (Hoffman, 2005; Nilsson, 2007). The federal branch organization in Sweden, BI, also supports this picture by their prioritized strategic goals (Internet, BI, 2004). They state that the reputation of the sector must be improved and the objective is to be regarded as a serious and competent actor in the Swedish business community. The increasing awareness of CSR should be seen as an opportunity for the sector, where all steps in the right direction will contribute to an enhanced reputation.

CSR is all about business conduct. The stakeholders' various experiences, of degree of met expectations, will determine the "territory", and thus the communication platform. A lack of transparency or awareness of needs to communicate sustainability issues may damage the territory, and thus the brand (Figure 2 & 3). Building a brand is a long term effort, but destroying it, by a CSR scandal, can happen overnight. The cartel incident in 2001 received a high degree of media coverage while major efforts in communicating a code of conduct at the same time received little attention. Communication of CSR does not only create awareness for CSR and support for an image or a brand, it is also a way of creating a bond between the company and its stakeholders (Maignan & Ferrell, 2004).

CSR related news that has been in focus in the press make companies work actively with these issues. In the Skanska case, they have faced two major CSR crises in the recent decades, and it is clear that media has forced Skanska to develop a more active CSR approach. The negative attention has been so harmful for Skanska's image that it had to be turned to something positive, a more active approach towards CSR. The primary drivers for this change were outside forces, such as environmental

emergencies and disagreement with societal norms, verbalized by media (Beckman, 1997). Many of the receivers of this information, foremost external stakeholders, have little insight into industrial conditions and in actual business conduct. This gives media the role of an interpreter of "product characteristics" (Figure 3) that eventually limits the possible size of the territory (Figure 2). The true product characteristics may even be hard to evaluate for the majority of stakeholders since the outcomes, in this case constructed objects (for example a house, a bridge or a tunnel), are long term investments that require an expert to evaluate their "true functions and qualities". When the evaluations are verbalized by trustworthy ambassadors (Thorstensson, 2006), they provide grounds for generalisation and discrimination – in other words for a general picture of Skanska's image and brand character.

Corporate legitimacy has been described as the "yardstick" for CSR (Schuman, 1995, 574). In 2001, that measure in the Skanska case would be a harsh one. The fact that their code of conduct was communicated did not reach many stakeholders – but the news of the cartel did. The experienced characteristics (news) and the efforts to create an ethical profile (the code of conduct) clashed, leaving little room to build a territory as a basis for CSR values of a Skanska brand. The development of an ethical code of conduct, in the Skanska case, was more than just PR tactics to please a critical press. It refers to re-thinking business conduct, motivated by external pressures that were internalized promoting a search for organizational legitimacy. It remains to be seen, however, if this is a part of a more systemic approach where sustainability measures are driven by inside forces (Richardson, 2004). One indication of such a change would be a change in policies and guidelines verbalized by the top management (Löhman & Steinholtz, 2003).

Conclusions – Brand as a CSR investment

In recent years, corporations have faced increasing CSR expectations from their societal environment (Balmer & Greysner, 2006; Michael, 2003; Whitehouse, 2006). CSR refers to compliance with legal obligations as well as moral rules above and beyond "business as usual". In a search for societal acceptance and legitimacy, businesses communicate their ethical grounds for conducting business in CSR actions.

Communicating CSR requires an understanding of consumer insights in other words the profile. Customers may attribute value based on, for example, personal positive experiences or positive verdicts from trusted sources, the so-called ambassadors. But what about CSR-values? They represent credence values that are difficult to see, measure and confirm. The credence values are founded in the corporate ethical stands. These values are based on trust, and they are sensitive to a negative verdict from, for example, media. Media's role in relaying information is not neutral by any means. News that attracts attention will affect the territory for corporate communication. Media may take on the role as a critical screen to distinguish CSR strategies from CSR stunts, forcing corporations to communicate their ethical stands.

Communication alone will not do the trick. "Talk" and no "walk" will quickly be labelled as a green wash of the corporate image, strategic stunts, or guerrilla marketing for subtly reaching consumers. If the consistency between words and action is weak it may be attributed to managerial complexities (Lindfeldt, 2006), and it limits the territory for building trust and creating a corporate image. Cause related marketing requires an understanding of how the brand carries values above and beyond the

product itself. What is foretold in an annual report, a sustainability report or on a corporate home page in terms of CSR action thus becomes an important communication platform and a condition for creating a large territory to support credence values, and ultimately the grounds for creating a strong brand.

Branding is perceived as an asset, a long term investment, expressed as goodwill, loyalty, reputation, a guarantee for present and future consumer preference. Assuming that the consumer expectations of quality, usefulness, and timeliness of a product are met, social values may presently strengthen the brand. Looking ahead, however, social values may become just as much

of a “hygiene” factor as quality and design are at present. CSR will thus be taken for granted, as an institutionalized part of the corporate marketing umbrella.

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Personal message

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Senior Vice President, Sustainability
Skanska AB, Solna, Sverige
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