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THE RELEVANCY OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (CSR) AS AN IMPLEMENTATION
CONTEXT FOR INDUSTRY-CONSENSUS PRINCIPLES FOR RESPONSIBLE SPACE OPERATIONS

Abstract

As the private sector becomes an increasingly significant share of the actors operating in the space domain, a number of efforts are underway to develop industry consensus statements or publications of voluntary principles for responsible space operations. Principles (or related concepts) of this type are under consideration or development in a diverse range of space industry sub-segments such as: space mining, on-orbit servicing, and constellation operations. Successful development and implementation of these principles will contribute to the safety of operations in the orbital domain, through non-regulatory means.

Such voluntary principles – albeit often with an ecological sustainability focus - have been successfully developed in other industries (including the mining, forestry, and information technology sectors). Implementation of those principles at the firm level has often been undertaken in the context of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives. CSR has been defined by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development as “the continuing commitment by business to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as of the local community and society at large” (Asongu, 2007).

As the space industry develops and commits to voluntary responsible operations principles; it must consider how those principles will be reflected in actual operations. It must understand the corporate strategy context, at the firm level, in which responsibility is integrated with business. This paper will, assess the relevancy of CSR as a method for providing that implementation context – by comparing element of the emergent discussion on responsible operations principles to the experience of CSR implementation in other industries. In doing so the paper builds upon work originally published by the author in 2016 (“Applying Corporate Social Responsibility Principles in the Space Sector,” Reinventing Space Conference, BIS-RS-2016-45, Oct 27, 2016. With Ryan Wells). Since the publication of this 2016 paper – industry efforts to develop voluntary principles have advanced from conceptual discussion to development.