

Stances on Social Responsibility Issues

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WHAT'S COVERED

People react differently to change. Some love it, but many hate it. Some people will go out of their way to keep change from happening, and companies are no different. This tutorial will cover the basic stances of companies toward social responsibility issues. Our discussion breaks down as follows:

1. Responses to Social Responsibility Issues

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There are different stances or responses that companies can have to social responsibility issues—or *any* change for that matter.

Stances	Description	Example
Obstructionist	An approach to social responsibility in which the organization actively tries to avoid, slow down, or stop social responsibility.	The U.S. automotive industry is a good example of an obstructionist stance when it comes to the installation of seat belts in cars. When seat belt laws were first passed, requiring that they be installed in cars, companies went out of their way to say that it was dangerous, or that it was too expensive. They tried every tactic to avoid, slow down, or stop this change from happening.
Defensive	An approach to social responsibility in which the organization will fight any allegations of social irresponsibility. This may involve denial along the lines of, "No, I didn't do that" or "That didn't really happen."	You might see the tobacco industry taking this type of stance, in the way that they profess that they have no responsibility for what people do with their own bodies, and certainly no responsibility for the fact that people using tobacco are getting cancer. They are simply producing a product, and it is ultimately up to people to choose to use that product or not.

Accommodative	An approach to social responsibility in which the organization goes beyond the minimal standards of social responsibility, but doesn't necessarily seek to make major changes.	In international trade, companies taking an accommodative stance abide by all the laws and ensure they're not cheating anybody or doing something overtly irresponsible, but they're not going to go out of their way to change the market in a way that might benefit the people who are producing the actual product for them.
Proactive	An approach to social responsibility in which the organization goes beyond the minimal standards of social responsibility by actively anticipating future issues.	Recently, Ben and Jerry's, the ice cream company, changed their entire recipe for Coffee Heath Bar Crunch. They stopped using Heath bars and sourced another producer who was engaged in free trade practices and used more organic material, something that was in line with Ben and Jerry's stance on social responsibility. In doing this, they took a big risk of alienating people who eat that particular ice cream, but it was how that company wanted to act, and it fits their social responsibility stance.

It's important to note that these stances may not occur in isolation. For instance, companies will generally take the same stance, but businesses may vary in their stance based on the specifics of their situation. Some departments, even within the same company, may take the same stance, but that stance may be different than others.

You can see that because of the difficulty involved in defining something as ambiguous as social responsibility, it can get a bit complicated, even within the same company that generally holds one particular stance on an issue.

IN CONTEXT

In California, air pollution is a big issue. There is a high concentration of people, so naturally, air regulations are fairly tight.



Obstructionist Stance: Companies with an obstructionist stance would take actions like advertising about how the regulations are bad for the economy, or they might move out of state, or even stop doing business in California altogether.

Defensive Stance: Companies with a defensive stance would continue to operate as normal, but they may also deny that operations are contributing to the air pollution problem within a certain state or a nation.

Accommodative Stance: Companies with an accommodative stance would follow the law. In fact, they may even buy the latest technology, but they're not going to go above and beyond to change the situation any further--they're happy with it the way it is.

Proactive Stance: Companies with a proactive stance would obey the law, but they would go above and beyond to be as socially responsible as they can be. They're not satisfied with doing the minimum that the law requires. They want to make sure that this issue is taken care of, and that it's taken care of by the business. These are people who might advocate or fund political campaigns for air pollution laws and regulations within that particular state or nation.



TERMS TO KNOW

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Defensive Stance

An approach to social responsibility in which the organization will fight any allegations of social irresponsibility.

Accommodative Stance

An approach to social responsibility in which the organization goes beyond the minimal standards of social responsibility but does not necessarily seek to make major changes.

Proactive Stance

An approach to social responsibility in which the organization goes beyond the minimal standards of social responsibility by actively anticipating future issues.



SUMMARY

Today, we learned about companies and their possible **responses to social responsibility issues**: the obstructionist stance, defensive stance, accommodative stance, and proactive stance. We also explored those stances in practice and how companies might view an issue like air pollution using each one of those stances.

Good luck!



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