Toward a Culture of Corporate Citizenship via an Innovative Organizational Model

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In today's business landscape corporations of all sizes are recognizing that efforts to meet the needs of internal and external stakeholders through sound business practices are becoming an integral component to organizational success. A recent survey conducted jointly by the Centers for Corporate Citizenship at Boston College and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and sponsored by the Hitachi Foundation (The State of Corporate Citizenship in the U.S. : A View From the Inside 2003-2004) found that 82% of executives surveyed felt that good corporate citizenship helps the bottom line and over half felt that it helps their customers. Several studies conducted in the field of organizational psychology have linked organizational citizenship behaviors with desirable business outcomes such as customer satisfaction and profitability (Koys, 2001). Our core argument centers on the fact that functional changes necessary to effect the culture needed for a greater measure of corporate citizenship are extremely difficult to implement in situations and corporations where long established paradigms have been established (Chatman and Barsade, 1995) and where current pressures are still running counter to willingness to focus on issues other than profit. Here an innovative structure is proposed as an alternative to prevailing corporate hierarchies to better facilitate the culture change necessary to promote a higher standard of corporate citizenship. We suggest that the marriage of structural and functional change is necessary to facilitate such outcomes. Resolving problems internal to the organization and creating a greater wealth of resources (i.e. time and money) in the process should allow a focus of both attention and resources on external stakeholders to ramp up corporate citizenship efforts. It is important to note much of this work is still conceptual in nature but research efforts are underway to confirm its practical application.

Organizational shift from old to new structures in the post industrial era

Organizations that comprise the prevailing business paradigm are typically traditional hierarchies, commonly referred to as corporate ladders. These hierarchal models are characterized by high power culture, reward and punishment leadership styles, multiple tiers of leadership, and a top-down management philosophy (Tiernan, Flood, Murphy & Carroll, 2002). In recent years numerous studies have advocated modifications to practices typical of traditional hierarchal firms, including gain sharing (Fisher, 2000), information sharing, between group helping (Rosenberg and Travino, 2003) self-managed teams, and empowerment of employees. Traditional hierarchies have long faced challenges which include principal-agent problems, class differences, poor accessibility to leadership, and salary imbalances (Jameson, 1999). Hierarchal models typically involve a system where individuals on one level must compete with one another for promotion to the next tier. It has been previously proposed that such competition is often destructive and should be abolished entirely (Tjosvold, Johnson, Johnson and Sun, 2003). Traditional corporate ladder structures have thus created mainstream cultures that promote competition, achievement orientation, and individualism. In effect, a *flawed structural design*, deeply rooted in leaders' ways of thinking and socialization, prohibits the organization from optimally effecting a culture in which great corporate citizenship is inherent. One often hears about the 'corporate games' that people play to advance their rank – resorting to manipulation and subversion is not uncommon in many of today's corporations.

Organization development scholars have long advocated principles to effect positive change within organizations and promote the maximization of synergies. Many of these prevailing themes must be considered in order to properly define a strategy which organizations can follow to effect positive change and increase synergistic value. The successful implementations of various key functions can serve to help effect a paradigm shift, stimulate change agents, and foster a collaborative cultural atmosphere that advocates a higher degree of corporate citizenship. Furthermore, we propose that success in developing such a culture can be facilitated if accompanied by an appropriate organizational structure. A recurrent theme noticeable in much of the last decade's organizational scholarship is that *people are the organization's greatest asset* and as such they drive the success of the organization (Luthans, 1998). This lends utmost credence to a corporate philosophy which takes care to nurture its people and cater to individual needs to foster the success of the organization as a whole. Furthermore, global citizenship can be better promoted if the people that comprise the organization are hired selectively with consideration not only for skill sets but their standards of ethics and integrity and desire to help effect environmental and community benefit. The organization needs to value the diversity of its members to help cultivate a shared vision of workplace equity and corporate citizenship – this philosophy will not only provide a wealth of diverse perspectives and ideas but could position the organization better given today's global economy (Luthans, 1998).

Suggesting an innovative structural mechanism to facilitate desired outcomes

Experiments with implementation have been on going for years. For example BP's structure was redesigned in the early 1990's to allow both for fewer layers of management and tighter integration across business units. Generally speaking, the aforementioned functional changes are difficult to implement given the prevailing paradigms and the traditional corporate hierarchies which predominate in business today. Often organizational change efforts get stuck at the upper

levels of a company, perhaps associated with a new leader and may then die quickly when that leader's tenure expires (Luthans, 1998).

We envision an extrapolation of these functional benefits advocated by progressive organizations advocating collaboration and equity and some of the structural changes that have helped to achieve these to create an original, symmetric, collectivistic model. The model represents a symbolic shift from ladder to table – from individualism and competition to interdependence and collaboration (Figure 1). Individuals do not equate success to climbing upward or jockeying for position – the focus now shifts to collaborating with one another so that the organization can turn its attention to the external environment where its stakeholders are prominent (Fisher, 2000). Here an innovative structure is proposed to better facilitate the culture change necessary to promote a higher standard of corporate citizenship.



Figure 1: A Symbolic shift from Ladder to Table

The proposed organizational structure is comprised of two distinct states:

Physically, a Ring of Rings

Each ring represents a functional unit of the organization and is structured much like a bicycle wheel, a hub-and-spoke structure with the spokes representing idea sharing between members

that comprise the unit and the hub representing the individual (determined via consensus) best suited to lead that unit. Idea sharing is facilitated between rings and is represented by a circle tangential to the outer perimeter of each ring. Connecting the hubs of these circles creates a smaller, concentric circle of leaders who can be likened to a board of directors. Idea sharing across this ring of leaders can then result in the selection via consensus of one leader deemed best suited to represent the organization and lead it to greatness (See Figure 2).



Figure 2 : Physical Ring of Rings

Ideologically, a Cone of Cones

Each cone in the ideological state represents a ring in the physical state. The cone is formed by elevating the leader at the center of each ring in the minds of ring members to form the tip of each cone. Connecting these cone tips forms the same concentric ring of leaders in the physical model, tiered ideologically higher. Likewise the idea sharing across this ring allows the

elevation of one true leader in the minds of these leaders to the tip of one conical pyramid (See Figure 3).



The structure proposed lends to many advantages over conventional, two-dimensional corporate ladders. It is not complete, however, unless accompanied by tenets of corporate governance advocating a culture of collaboration, service, and passion. Together these combine to create an inimitable culture which fosters the maximization of synergy and the advocacy of corporate citizenship.

How the new structure might better support a culture of global citizenship

The advantages of this structure in terms of corporate citizenship are illustrated through the application of the new structure to functional areas where change is needed and problems persist in traditional corporate hierarchies.

Information sharing is designed into the architecture of the workspace

Information Sharing is optimized in the new structure in that privileged information is not withheld from members – as is often the case with upper management in traditional organizational structures. This greatly reduces the ambiguity and uncertainty which is often a source of stress and dissonance within organizations. The new model is structured such that information can be shared freely across rings (represented by the spokes in the physical model) as well as between between divisions (represented by the circle tangential to each ring). Also, because more information is available to more people there is a greater likelihood that information can be leveraged to create value. An implied trust is inherent to the process. The potential or temptation for corruption due to privileged (insider) information is mitigated, since there are no information asymmetries that could be exploited for individual advantage. In this way standards of ethics and integrity which are so essential to corporate citizenship are ensured. Also since more information is available to more individuals, there should be greater potential to use that information in ways that not only create value for the organization but for external stakeholders and society at large. Individuals can feel free to contribute and such an offering would be more likely to be received warmly and supported in a culture of collaboration and contribution, where innovative thinking and diverse perspectives are valued. Idea sharing across these rings could be likened to efforts of 'think-and-do' tanks where ideas can be collectively developed and improved to foster innovation and improve synergistic value.

Accessibility to leadership is optimal under the proposed model since all members of the novel organization reside on the same physical plane. Any level of the physical structure can be easily reached by traversing the distance from the outermost ring to the center of the physical model

(the radius of the circle). Likewise, every ideological tier can be accessed by traversing the outer surface of the cone from base to tip. An open-door policy prevails to encourage interpersonal interaction and collaboration between all employees. At Dana Corporation, a company known for progressive policies, the office of the CEO is the first one encountered upon entering corporate headquarters. When leaders are relatively inaccessible, as is the case in many traditional hierarchies – there can be resentment, complacency or simply a lack of guidance and nurturing getting to the respective employee. There is less likelihood that the individual's needs are being met. From an informational standpoint bureaucratic inefficiencies common to traditional hierarchies might slow and impede valuable contributions from employees which could lead to process improvements. Also close relationships might be less likely to be cultivated between individuals residing on different tiers due to these deficiencies in accessibility so less information exchange occurs and less trust is generated. As a result, the intellectual capital that could be cultivated might be lower in traditional corporate hierarchies than in a structure that maintains equity and accessibility between members. Such capital represents a resource advantage which could be employed toward good causes, researching sustainable practices, or developing innovative new ideas and to raise standards of corporate citizenship.

Principal Agent Problems

In today's organizations there is often a struggle to align the interests of stakeholders, management, and employees – disparate parties who often maintain conflicting agendas. Resolving these Principal-Agent problems has long been a challenge for those subscribing to today's prevailing corporate structures – some corporations have gone as far as to include shareholders in a position above the board of directors on their organizational charts (Luthans 1998).

These Principal-Agent problems are mitigated in the new model by equating the principals and the agents. The completely flat physical structure implies that profit or compensation is shared equally by all members of the organization. Organizational fit has been traditionally defined as 'a question of how well the person's needs are satisfied by organizational outcomes and how well the organization's demands are met by the person's qualifications and contributions to organizational ends (French, Rogers, and Cobb 1974). The goals of the individual and the organization are *aligned* optimally under the new model in that there is an inherent incentive to maximize firm value in order to maximize individual compensation. Corporations today feature disconnects between shareholders, management, and employees – under the new model, the firm remains private and thus resolves many of these. Traditional corporations attempt to mitigate principal agent problems using incentives like stock options as an alignment mechanism, but these can become largely ineffective measures due to turbulent market conditions. When disparate parties maintain disparate agendas conflicts result and compromises need to be made which might not be the optimal solution to a given problem. Also, pressures to satisfy outside parties can result in unethical practices (hiding true financial performance via the manipulation of financial reporting, hiding information from parties to which there is accountability, advancing personal agendas, etc). These behaviors are clearly in conflict with the standards of ethics and integrity needed for true corporate citizenship.

Accountability of leadership is inherent to the novel structure in that the leaders are accountable *to those who follow them.* There is an inherent incentive for the leader to satisfy his people. Those that follow reserve the right of removal by the same consensus which selects the leader. The maximum number of employees content with their manager is thus maintained, and leaders are kept 'on their toes'- held to the highest standards and ideals. Employees are encouraged to select leaders who are best suited to lead them to success – those that have earned the respect of their peers and possess superior leadership traits. In traditional hierarchies each level looks upward for accountability. Leaders are concerned with meeting the requirements and demands of those above them yet this can result in sacrificing a focus of attention on their people-resources below. In traditional corporate structures a leader who is inefficient, unethical or lacking in integrity may be able to remain part of the organization due to exclusive or privileged relations, (i.e. the CEO's inept son-in-law being installed as a VP in the company could have a negative ripple-down effect throughout the hierarchy).

Leadership Succession is greatly facilitated when employing the proposed structure. Should a leader be lost for any reason a replacement can *quickly* be elevated to that position from a relevant ring of members *already knowledgeable of the issues and concerns of the firm*. This eliminates the cost incurred through expensive executive search and training programs which are common in traditional corporations. Learning curves are minimized, as is time without leadership in place. The structure also aids in terms of 'quality assurance' and integrity of leadership in mitigating the risk incurred in hiring externally form a pool of individuals who might not subscribe to the prevailing culture or have difficulty becoming acclimated to it. From a corporate governance standpoint, there is less potential compromise of ethical standards or

need to wait for acclimation to the prevailing culture when the replacement leader comes from within the organization and has already been actively involved with the issues pertinent to that post.

Destructive Competition is greatly mitigated by the novel structure since individuals residing on the same physical tier will not be tempted to subvert one another (consciously or not) to attain promotion to the next rung on the corporate ladder. Pitting employees against one another in this fashion can breed resentment, encourage currying of favoritism, or lead to underhanded tactics (backstabbing, gossip, etc) (Liefooghe and Davey, 2001). This system encourages collaboration rather than competition and thus increases the likelihood that individuals will genuinely help one another to succeed (there is no incentive in the new structure to refrain from helping behavior in order to retain hierarchal superiority or individual competitive advantage). In terms of corporate governance and ethics there is less temptation or motivation to resort to unethical or underhanded tactics in jockeying for position or fighting for promotion. Such activities undermine integrity within the organization. There is less opportunity or temptation for ethical transgression under the new model. Knowing that equity will be maintained, members can shift focus from internal rivalry to the satisfaction of external stakeholders which is critical to corporate citizenship.

Opportunity for Success for new hires is considerable. A great talent can quickly be promoted ideologically should talent and other characteristics become apparent to the masses. The proposed organization should attract a wealth of great young talent because of the (relatively) superior compensatory benefit represented by an equal share of profits of the firm as well as the cultural benefit represented by the collaborative atmosphere of trust and safety presented to

prospective employees. In traditional corporate structures employees might be tempted to perform to a set standard which they attribute to be commensurate with a fixed salary. In the new structure *incentive* is in place to bring new hires up to speed quickly so they can be of optimal benefit to the organization as soon as possible. This also helps ensure rapid individual growth, learning, and prosperity. A warm, inviting culture of collaboration, interdependence, trust and safety cultivated by the new structure should provide added incentive for new hires to not only come on board but stay with the company. Attracting a large pool of qualified young talent to an organization helps ensure the likelihood that exceptional people will be hired. A greater number of candidates also ensures that the select minority who are brought on board will have the necessary qualities (talent, integrity, selflessness, passion) needed to help ensure success as an organization committed to corporate citizenship.

Salary Imbalances are eliminated – both those typically existing between management and employee as well as those existing within those of equal rank who might be compensated unequally due to racial or gender bias – or as a result of differentials in salary negotiations. Resolving these imbalances mitigates the likelihood of dissonance (resentment, apathy) as well as the threat of lawsuits that can arise from such imbalances. Also eliminating disproportionate compensation mitigates the temptation for corruption within upper management due to a disproportionate financial stake held by key decision makers (i.e. Enron, Tyco). It may also mitigate ethical transgression on the opposite end of the compensation spectrum where switching / termination costs might be low enough to warrant cheating, etc on the part of employees. Workplace equity is thus greatly facilitated using the new model. Reducing resentments (such as those between 'haves' and 'have-nots' in traditional corporate structures) and resolving inequity

creates more balance and harmony within the organization. Individuals can act in better synergy with one another with more willingness to collaborate under conditions of equity and fairness.

Self Managed teams are at the heart of this model. Each core division and its associated leader are given free reign and trust (empowered) to manage itself to achieve and surpass goals. Should problems arise counsel can be sought from leadership or intervention can then occur. This ensures a level of empowerment and associated intrinsic motivation to encourage taking responsibility for one's own actions and communicating a higher level of trust between individuals and groups. This is an improvement over traditional hierarchies that employ a command-and-control philosophy. Cross Functional aspects are inherent to the new structure in that members can migrate freely from one division to another by trading positions. This also ensures against complacency and maintains intrinsic motivation. The board of directors comprised of leaders from each divisional unit (the smaller concentric ring) is a cross functional team capable of functioning as a holistically-aware decision making and selective-hiring unit. This board functions in a unified manner with core functions given equal consideration – therefore reaping the benefits of between-group-helping (Rosenberg and Trevino 2003). Complacency and boredom with job position can occur in traditional rigid structures where individuals are restricted to particular job duties. This might not only lead to attrition but temptation to satisfice or only perform up to a baseline standard due to the mitigation of intrinsic motivation. Individuals should not feel trapped, limited or restricted lest the passion that can create new ideas, inspire greater service levels and stimulate production be mitigated.

Balance between functional units (rings) ensures no issue of power and politics that emerge later due to the disproportionate growth of core functions which often occurs in traditional corporate hierarchies. By maintaining a balanced makeup and equal size core functionalities are given equal consideration, budget, etc. Core divisions should grow equally in size over time. The same issues that arise between individuals due to information asymmetry or power imbalances can occur between groups and divisions in traditional corporate structures. Since the core divisions and their budgets are kept in balance there is less likelihood that corporate decision making will sway in favor of a dominant (larger size or budget) function. Cross functionality is not only maintained with each division having equal representation on the board of directors, but balance between functions is kept to ensure that all representative views are heard and given equal consideration. This helps develop workplace equity on the group/divisional level and helps ensure corporate policymaking and governance is given representative, unbiased consideration.

Service Oriented and Organizationally Committed Leadership is Facilitated

Traditional corporate cultures often feature power-oriented leaders with command-and-control leadership philosophies. These strategies have been shown to alienate employees and create an 'us versus them' mentality between executive and employee. The innovative structure serves to resolve the problem of ego-based leadership by creating leadership roles which attract selfless leaders who accept the role due to a desire for organizational success and higher degree of corporate citizenship. We contend that leaders attracted to the hub of each ring - a position devoid of superior financial compensation yet demanding additional responsibility and subject to the scrutiny of ring members – would likely be less self-centered and more focused on bettering organizational outcomes – they are a rare breed willing to work harder for equal compensation.

External collaborations are fostered in the model by offering the opportunity for temporary or permanent linkages. Corporations face an increasingly competitive landscape and many organizations struggle to compete with one another for advantages in the marketplace. An attitude of collaboration and willingness to strategically partner with organizations to leverage complementary asset-resources to mitigate risk and cost can help fill gaps and create value. Several organizations can connect using the proposed structure to form 'virtual organizations' when the leaders of each collaborating organization represents a 'virtual council member' within a ring of other organizational leader/representatives. These collaborations can be beneficial from the standpoint of corporate governance in that fresh information, ideas, and concepts can be gained from such relationships. New lessons can be learned from what other organizations are doing in regards to sustainable practices, or community benefit endeavors – cross organizational learning is facilitated that may not be possible within the confines of the organization. These external influences can help mitigate the phenomenon known as groupthink- where thinking and behavior can confirm to homogeneous or closed-minded norms (Luthans, 1998). Mergers between organizations of like structure (two firms employing the novel structure) are greatly *facilitated* by overlapping functional rings – or perhaps the entire structure - to create a newly combined and integrated whole. This would translate to tremendous cost savings when compared to the cost and effort in merging two corporate hierarchies of differing size and structure (elimination of redundancies, downsizing, etc, etc). If this merger is relatively seamless and creates a larger and more powerful entity while retaining homogeneity in terms of service culture and citizenship this would be create a more potent force advocating corporate social responsibility.

The many arguments supporting a new structure which can facilitate a culture more amenable to corporate citizenship efforts are connected by a prevailing theme. They all suggested methods of delivering greater value to the organization. Whether the improved value is delivered along the dimension of information sharing, workplace equity, collaborative behaviors, innovation, ethical integrity, divisional balance, derivation of cost savings or freed up time there is a potential to create synergy and value that would not be possible employing traditional corporate structures or philosophies. The aforementioned Center for Corporate Citizenship survey found that executives felt that the primary impediment to corporate citizenship was "a lack of resources". We can surmise that the effective merger of structural and functional change might better generate the resources to enable organizations to pursue corporate citizenship behaviors. Furthermore, the novel structure suggests the mitigation of problem areas common in traditional hierarchies. As a result there could be a shift in focus from internal problems and disconnects to external stakeholders – satisfying customers, pursuing sustainable practices which benefit the environment we all live in, or pursuing philanthropic activities which help derive community benefit. But this attitude and behavior on the part of the organization can best succeed if a philosophy of corporate citizenship is embraced by all of its members (Graversen and Johansson, 1998). This brings us back to the importance of people as the organization's most valuable asset. Selecting individuals who understand the value of corporate citizenship and believe is important - yet it is also critical to provide a workplace environment and culture that can help cultivate these behaviors and maximize their potential via the collaboration and interdependence of its members. An inviting workplace needs to be created that creates an atmosphere of trust and

safety and encourages interaction and synergy on both the individual and group levels. This newly proposed structure and its associated functional tenets aim to do exactly that.

Potential Issues and Problems

The proposed collective model presents many qualities which lend to superiority over traditional corporate hierarchies. To ensure success, however a paradigm shift is necessary – one which embraces collectivism and collaboration over individualism and ego. We have identified potential problems that may arise should one not proceed with utmost caution:

Free rider problems may emerge where complacency can set it if members are guaranteed equal share of profits (compensation). Selective hiring of self-driven, passionate, and hardworking people is thus critical. This problem can also be mitigated by creating the understanding and shared vision that stronger effort should produce greater organizational success – and greater firm benefit translates back to greater individual benefit in the new model. This problem can also be ameliorated if members hold each other accountable to a higher standard and push one another to succeed. Intrinsic motivation must not only be present but maintained and grown if possible, and passion must shine.

The prevailing attitude that one's position deserves higher recognition and or compensation than others must be overcome. Regardless of duty one has to see its importance to the big picture and to organizational success. **Ego** can be a major issue as well. There needs to be a measure of selflessness for this to work and temperance of ego is a critical success factor. The idea is not to

prove superiority or do better than others, but to do one's best and strive to raise others up to that level.

It may be difficult to those who have put forth more time and effort (have **seniority**) over others to bring newcomers up to speed quickly or want to share profit immediately. The feeling that 'one must earn their keep' is at the crux of this. This can be mitigated by creating the understanding that a new member brought up to speed quickly under the new model translates to a) greater benefit to the firm (and thus each individual) and b) relieves other members of work pressure through shared responsibility. It should also be made clear that collaborative behavior creates an **aggregate** force in favor of corporate citizenship – helping behaviors between individuals can free up time spent by management in supervisory duties – and thus allow leadership to focus on external stakeholders rather than catering to employee issues (Koys 2001). The attitude needs to be such that the talent of the new individual and the potential for greatness of the individual is realized – there should be a desire in all members to bring the best out of one another and help one another excel.

Research and Practice Agenda

Efforts are already underway to investigate the correlation between efficacy of this novel model and global citizenship. Data gathering and analysis involves survey feedback analysis, scenario forecasting, and computer modeling. To cite one example - results from preliminary survey feedback show statistical significance along two critical success factors for organizations – job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Taking these as mitigating influences on attrition we then ran a basic scenario forecast analysis which looked at best, worst, and middle case attrition rates and forecast the cost savings associated with each in one particular industry

(hotels) where turnover rates are a major problem. Results showed that considerable cost savings would result should implementation of the new structure successfully mitigate attrition as predicted. These preliminary efforts have not even considered turnover management cost savings through avoidance of executive search and training costs. Such cost savings could create new opportunities to direct new funding toward researching sustainable practices, initiating community benefit programs, and so on. Additional research might focus on comparing levels of philanthropy, sustainable development, or collaboration to effect social change between computer-simulated organizations employing traditional hierarchies versus this new model.

The greatest test of the model's success however will be practical implementation. There are many possibilities regarding potential implementation strategies. It will be much easier to implement this model with new and small ventures with less established paradigms and flatter (or no) existing hierarchies. Similarly it will be easier to effect the necessary culture change where cultural paradigms have had less time to set and entrench. Collectivistic cultures might be more accepting of the collaborative philosophy embraced by new model. Studies have also shown that cultural factors may play a major role in facilitating change as do economic conditions. (Zhu, 2000). One potential solution in existing hierarchies would be to 'fatten' each tier of the ladder hierarchy by placing multiple members at each node of the ladder (replacing the individual with a collaborative group). The 'flattening' of hierarchy can be accomplished by eliminating unnecessary levels of (mid-level) management, employing information technology aggressively, and encouraging intrapreneurship and self-managed teams (Luthans, 1998). This combination of fattening and flattening could help the organization reach the more optimal structure and begin to effect the cultural change necessary to foster a higher degree of

collaboration and interdependence. Great benefit might await the firm that has the courage and tenacity to work with and integrate the new design model and the 'new culture in support of corporate citizenship'.

Conclusion

We conclude with this premise: the highest standards of corporate citizenship, corporate governance, and corporate social responsibility can best be achieved if the organization can successfully implement critical functional changes to facilitate a culture of collaboration and interdependence. This culture can best be implemented when associated with a structure that best enables the implementation of these principles. Today's organizations are hindered in many cases by steeply tiered hierarchies which foster characteristics (individualism, information asymmetry, high power culture, inaccessibility, destructive competition) which mitigate the organization's true potential for corporate citizenship. The structural inefficiency of traditional corporate hierarchies and the culture which often results create impediments and costs which restrict the implementation of functional change. Here an organizational structure adapted to suit these functions is suggested to facilitate a collaborative and synergistic culture capable of freeing up resources which can be better directed toward stakeholders so that the highest standard of corporate citizenship is achieved.

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