Accountability for Sustainability: Private Interest vs. Social Responsibility

As a society, we have different expectations of the social responsibility of organisations and business. Social responsibility is the impact of organisations on society and the natural environment. Neglecting this responsibility by focusing only on the private interest, leads to social issues (for example, poverty and inequality) and environmental degradation. What can we as a society expect from companies and organisations operating in our midst? But more importantly, how can we determine what these organisations are actually doing in this space? Accountability for sustainability requires answers to these important questions.

In his professorial address, Chris van Staden explores the ways in which the social responsibility of organisations can be assessed. While some of these methods are more reliable than others, a problem remains if business see their social responsibility as an add-on that is not part of their core focus. Social capitalism, i.e., making positive social improvements, requires a rethink of the role of business in society.

Chris van Staden is a Professor of Accounting at the AUT Business School. He teaches courses in Social and Environmental Accounting and Research Methods. His research interests include the disclosure of information, specifically environmental and social disclosures, focussing on what sustainable business will look like from reporting, governance and accountability perspectives. He publishes his research findings internationally and is the recipient of the Faculty of Business, Economics and Law Excellence in Academic Research Award for 2017. He is the New Zealand President of the Accounting and Finance Association of Australia and New Zealand. He held positions at the University of Canterbury, the University of Auckland and Massey University in New Zealand and several South African universities before joining AUT. Chris is an associate editor for Accounting and Business Research and serves on the editorial boards of a number of international journals.