Preface

I have published quite a lot within the area of relevance examination of fashionable management ideas (FMIs) for organizations in particular generalized contexts (that is, religions, national cultures, geographical areas, industries, sectors and so on) or, expressed differently, on contextualization of FMIs. This book, on corporate social responsibility (CSR) for organizations in various particular generalized contexts, is the fourth book on the contextualization and adaptation of FMIs published by Edward Elgar Publishing that I have edited. The first one dealt with the idea of the learning organization (Örtenblad 2013), the second with knowledge management (Örtenblad 2014) and the third with management ideas and panaceas in general (Örtenblad 2015). In addition, I have co-edited a book on the relevance (and, thus, the contextualization and adaptation) of various FMIs for health care organizations (Örtenblad et al. 2016) and co-authored an article on the relevance of the learning organization idea for higher educational institutions (Örtenblad and Koris 2014).

From what I have learnt throughout this ‘journey’, the work on contextualizing panaceas has just begun. There is an overall need to put more emphasis on context and relevance examination of FMIs. In particular, there is a need for more knowledge on how to escape these ‘black-or-white’ debates on FMIs, where 98 percent (or so) of the debaters praise the FMI as *the* solution that *all* organizations around the world – no matter in which context they exist – should or even must adopt the exact same version of, and where the remaining debaters argue that the FMI at stake is *only* a fashion that no organization whatsoever needs to care about. There is also a need for more knowledge on how researchers can better examine the relevance of particular FMIs for generalized contexts, as well as a need for more knowledge on how other groups of actors – such as researchers, consultants, organizational actors and students – can better contextualize and customize FMIs for individual organizations. There is, of course, also a need for contextualized versions of FMIs, which fit organizations in particular contexts.

There is also reason to dig further into the character of FMIs. Some of those with whom I have been in contact when getting the present book together have argued that CSR is different from other FMIs, and some have even indicated that CSR is not an FMI at all. To comment on the question of whether or not CSR is an FMI, let me say that when I use

expressions such as ‘FMI’, ‘fashion’, ‘management idea’ or the like, I do not mean to put any certain values into these concepts. As stated above, for me the issue is not about whether these FMIs are good or bad, but how relevant they are in relation to various generalized contexts and situations. Nevertheless, I have come to learn and agree that CSR is different from other FMIs in at least some respects, even if it is difficult to say exactly how different CSR is.

I have made three main observations when it comes to possible differences between CSR and other FMIs. One difference is that symbolic efficiency (Abrahamson 1991) is often seen as a natural part of CSR, while there is a much clearer distinction between technical efficiency and symbolic efficiency when it comes to other FMIs, where technical efficiency often is expressed as the ideal, while symbolic efficiency is the implicit (but maybe intended) actual outcome. It may very well be that CSR can live longer than other FMIs in that the symbolic efficiency is openly confessed and even taken into account. Another difference may or may not have to do with the previous difference, and has to do with the character of the literature on CSR. Generally speaking, the literature on CSR seems to be much more nuanced than the literature on any other FMI. There are, of course, also those who are one-sidedly positive about CSR, as well as those who are one-sidedly negative, but it is easier to find works that are more nuanced on CSR than on any other FMI, especially the learning organization. The third difference deals with the fact that CSR is not only there to improve the conditions for the individual organization that adopts it, but also for others. This can also explain the greater focus there is on various stakeholders in CSR compared with many other FMIs.

Finally, all contributors deserve a big thank you for their insightful chapter contributions. They have also been very patient. My sincere thanks to all of you! A big thanks also to Rebecca Stowell, Senior Desk Editor at Edward Elgar Publishing, for always being so helpful.

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Bodø, Norway, May 2016

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