



Exploring the Unknown: Does too small to see mean too small to manage?

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Interested in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) but not sure what to do and where to start? Want some information with which to talk to the board? Need practical examples of how other companies are using CSR to achieve sustainable business success? Article 13 can help you.

As part of their ongoing programme Article 13, the leading corporate social responsibility experts, have researched and released a feature examining the opportunities and risks presented by nanotechnology and gene research.

Below is a synopsis of Article 13's feature article, "Does too small to see mean too small to manage?" The article can be accessed in full at www.article13.com.

PR9.NET August 04, 2005 - Nanotechnology and gene research are high tech areas which are frequently touted in the media as holding enormous business and investment potential. They are both areas where it is the norm to work with what is invisible to the naked eye.

Businesses can certainly reap rewards by using tiny technology as the basis for innovation, but when the vocabulary of your product is complicated, and the product can't be seen by the human eye, then it's difficult to keep all stakeholders on board. If you, or your customers, are unable to grasp the concepts and communicate them well, then the understandable reaction is to fear the unknown.

The potential benefits of these 'tiny technologies' is enormous. Besides the visible development of new consumer products, such as transparent sunscreens, scientists now believe nanotechnology will improve quality of life in developing countries and significantly enhance agricultural productivity. Gene technology, on the other hand, may offer long-awaited cures to diseases that afflict humans, animals and crops.

The risks largely focus on what is currently unknown. With genetic engineering there are fears of human misuse, of health effects, and irreversible genetic pollution of the environment. In the case of nanotechnology, production of cheaper more efficient products may lead to conflicts or changes, ranging from a new era of arms races to environmental damage by product overuse. Regulation may struggle to keep up and a black market of tiny technology smugglers may emerge.

A major issue facing the industry is the management of uncertainty, namely the certainty of the technology doing what it is intended to do and whether, if the technology delivers, it will bring the anticipated returns to those who have funded its development. The potential of nanotechnology companies is huge. The investment literature for such companies is littered with terms like 'emerging solutions', promising that products may be cheaper, more efficient, more accurate. As yet this is all possibility, not reality. Unlike nanotechnology, gene technology is already offering canny investors good returns.

It will not be the scientist tinkering with genes, or the engineer creating nano-robots in the laboratory who brings problems for human and environmental well-being. It will be the irresponsible business manager, the short-sighted strategist and the unethical marketeer who, by creating and fulfilling new needs for reasons of profit rather than human well-being, cause a new wave of ethical issues to undermine business success.

To find out more... go to www.article13.com

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