



**DR. KERNAGHAN WEBB**  
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### ***A law and business professor connects the dots between law and CSR***

With three law degrees to his credit, Dr. Kernaghan Webb is fascinated by all types of rule systems – those based in law and those that go beyond what is required in law. His interest in how societal rule systems play out in the world of business has led him to become a key research figure in the area of corporate social responsibility (CSR), a relatively new field of study concerned with what businesses do to address social, environmental and economic issues, even when they are not legislatively required to do so.

“When you understand the full complement of societal rule systems at play, you really see why businesses do what they do,” says Dr. Webb. “This understanding can lead to solutions for unacceptable business behaviour.”

Whether it’s a Canadian grocery/apparel chain caught in the spotlight over the collapse of a Bangladesh apparel supplier factory, or banks being raked over the coals for replacing their Canadian workers with those from other countries, Dr. Webb claims there is no shortage of cases where CSR and the law intersect, both in Canada and in other jurisdictions.

While governments and laws remain the foundational source of rule structures for business, there is increasing

agreement that governments can’t and shouldn’t regulate everything, and that firms are expected to meet their “social licence,” as well as their legal licence by address-

ing their environmental and social impacts, even when not required by law to do so. Many businesses seek certification, for example, to various third party performance standards, in an effort to reduce their environmental impacts, make things better for workers, and address community issues.

Dr. Webb’s recent work reveals a significant shift by the private sector and civil society organizations towards ‘sustainable governance’, which he describes as a solution to the unique and quickly evolving multi-jurisdictional problems we face in the 21st century.

“CSR stands at the crossroads of law and government, and other rule systems that emanate from industry and civil society. Understanding the connections and conflicts among these rule systems is going to keep me busy for a very long time.”