

## **Bridging theory and practice: European evidence on operationalising digital responsibility in Small and Medium Enterprises**

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### **Abstract**

Corporate Digital Responsibility (CDR) has emerged as a critical framework to address societal, economic and environmental impacts of digital transformation, concerning use/re-use of data, design and deployment of advanced technology in business.

On the one hand, global digitalisation provides socio-economic and environmental benefits. On the other, we reside in an era where innovation and digital transformation present known and emergent risks. Business mindsets must shift from profit to purpose-driven, fostering adoption of safer digital and AI practices, irrespective of company size.

Significant conceptual progress has been made in establishing CDR as a principled framework in this context, with examples of large cooperations moving towards responsible behaviour. However, the ability to operationalise and implement CDR remains complex for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), hampered by multi-faceted challenges in adopting AI / digital technology.



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This paper provides practical input to address the adoption gap between CDR theory and practice in SMEs. The methodology draws on Corporate Social Responsibility literature, the experience of International CDR Manifesto members, and practitioners' initiatives across Europe that work on CDR with SMEs. This includes two Interreg cooperation projects covering 14 countries. The paper illustrates the findings through a comparative case study.

The paper demonstrates how, in the absence of standardised CDR regulations, practical initiatives already facilitate adoption of CDR methods and translate them into responsible digital practice for SMEs. Practical outcomes of the paper have implications in providing concrete support tools for SMEs.

Keywords: Digital Responsibility, Small and Medium Enterprises, Safer AI, Corporate Social Responsibility