

CSR IS KNOCKING: A CALL FOR HR TO JOIN

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ABSTRACT

Corporations across the world are called upon to engage in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). There is little doubt that corporate social programs can be more effective with the commitment of everyone within the organisation. The starting assumption of this paper is that the Human Resource (HR) unit, already working at embedding core values and implementing important initiatives in the workplace and community, can assume a focal role in CSR. In this context, the HR function can play a vital role in embedding socially responsible values among employees and mobilizing community relationships. The paper sheds light more specifically on three HR-CSR interfaces relating to: 1) employee communication and engagement, 2) diversity management, and 3) community relationships. The aim is to unearth the important symbiotic and mutually reinforcing connections between HR and CSR in these three areas and draw wider implications from there regarding the important role of HR in CSR.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility; Human Resource; Employees; Diversity; Community

INTRODUCTION

Today, corporations are under immense pressure to show that their business stands for something more than profits (Ledwidge, 2007). CSR represents a high-profile and competitive notion in today's holistic market environment (Luo and Bhattacharya, 2006). It is a concept that has attracted worldwide attention and acquired a new resonance in the global economy (Jamali and Mirshak, 2007). This new perception has increased the pressure on corporations to play key roles in the welfare of the communities and societies in which they operate (Balabanis *et al.*, 1998). In fact, CSR has now moved from the fringe to become a mainstream issue of concern in business (WBCSD, 2002).

According to the European Union (EU) (2001), CSR does not only mean fulfilling legal responsibilities but also going beyond compliance to embrace wider social, environmental and economic goals. Thus, it can be argued that CSR has always been a major influence in business. This concern has grown considerably however over the past few years (McAdam and Leonard, 2003). In this context, many companies have developed CSR programs to increase and boost their relational capital. For example, banks are pouring millions of dollars into different kinds of CSR strategies in the race to strengthen their reputation, thus contributing to different social concerns (McDonald and Thiele, 2008).

Not only are organizations expected to bear the burden of maintaining socially responsible activities, but

also governments are called upon to recognize the importance of CSR. Governments realized this fact; they are according attention to CSR and getting involved directly in promoting CSR themes. For example, the UK is on the lead in advocating the CSR agenda. The government appointed a Minister for Corporate Social Responsibility in March 2000. The role of this ministry is to raise CSR awareness; provide an enabling environment encouraging businesses to adopt responsible business practice both at home and in their international operations; and support and encourage adherence to international standards of business behaviour (Commission, 2008). The strategy for advancing this vision is to promote activities that bring economic, social and environmental benefits as well as to work in partnership with the private sector, community bodies, unions, consumers and other stakeholders. Further, the strategy of the government aims to encourage innovative approaches and good practices including raising awareness, trust and healthy public dialogue.

Social responsibility issues arise in relationships with most stakeholders, including employees and society at large. Stakeholder management seeks to enhance the integration between groups with a stake in the firm and managerial decision-making. Managers must develop relationships, inspire their stakeholders, and create communities where everyone strives to give their best to deliver added value (Freeman *et al.*, 2004). In this sense, stakeholder theory urges managers to be clear about the kinds of relationships they want and need to foster in relation to their stakeholders (Donaldson and Preston, 1995).

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HR units on the other hand are also dedicated to employee and community advancement, and are increasingly called upon to create win-win situations for an organization's multiple stakeholders through strategic partnerships (Schuler and Jackson, 2006). "Socially conscious human resource development serves an educative and supportive role to help organisations use their resources to benefit their stakeholders" (Bierema and D'Abundo, 2004 p. 449). Hatcher (2002 p. 50) suggests that "HR professionals have been complicit in helping to create organisations and workplaces that do little to enhance the human spirit or protect the environment."

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) describes the HR-CSR interfaces as follows:

Successful CSR programmes depend on enlightened people management practices. The HR department is responsible for many of the key systems and processes (e.g. recruitment, training, and communications) on which effective delivery depends. Getting the employment relationship right is a precondition for establishing effective relationships with external stakeholders. CSR does not change as much as broaden the HR agenda, and focuses on effective implementation (2003, p.4).

In other words, HR professionals have a crucial role to play in embedding a responsible approach in business fabrics. Also, effective implementation of HR plans; for example, in terms of employee communication, are crucial to projecting the image of a responsible employer. HR units are responsible for many of the key strategies including employee and community relationships, on which effective delivery of CSR initiatives depends.

Much of CSR studies and previous literature have examined the stakeholder theory of the firm and the role of managers to develop, inspire and create interactions and relationships with different stakeholder groups (Donaldson and Preston, 1995; Freeman, 1994). Yet, to date, HR appears to have been only marginally involved in CSR discussions and activities (Fenwick and Bierema, 2008). This gap is a new and real challenge for HR (Ledwidge, 2007).

This paper is an attempt to address the growing links and interfaces of HR and CSR. Sambrook (2004) forecasts that as the roles of HR mature, the role of HR in promoting CSR and its more humanistic ethos will also increase. CSR has a fundamental internal and community dimensions that clearly overlap with the function and objectives of HR (Unit and York, 2005). The following sections will briefly introduce and specifically examine three HR and CSR interfaces in relation to: 1) Employee Communication and Engagement, 2) Diversity Management, and 3) Community Relationships. The aim is to unearth the connections between HR and CSR in

these three important areas and to draw from there relevant implications regarding the role of HR in CSR. The paper ends with a discussion section and a summary of key conclusions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1- Employee Communication & Engagement

Employees are an essential and a primary stakeholder group. Employees provide a vital resource for the successful running of the organisation in the form of their labour and human capital (Neville and Menguc, 2006). CSR practices are keen to give attention to the importance of employee participants in formulating socially responsible ideas and plans. This interaction aims to boost the morale of the individual as well as the success of the organisation. Accordingly, such practices address the importance of communication between organisations and employees as key aspects to improve the ability of companies to serve the marketplace (Snider et al., 2003).

In 2008, *The Sunday Times* conducted the largest survey of its kind of "100 Best Companies to Work For" in the UK. This survey is considered a definitive guide to best employment practice and the most dynamic and desirable places to work (Times, 2008). The study comprised three surveys to capture the opinions of 180,000 employees. The survey is divided into eight factors each of which is essential to be one of the '100 Best Companies to Work For'. "Giving Something Back", measuring how much companies are socially and ethically respectable, was one of these factors. It was the only factor to make significant gain with rise of 1.8% from 61.6% in 2007 to 63.4% in 2008. In his interpretation about the survey results, Armstrong, director-general of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, argued that a lot of people want to work for someone socially and ethically respectable. According to him, employees prefer to work for a company which fits into a bigger context than just profits for shareholders (Times, 2008).

The results of this survey illuminate the increasing concern of employees about CSR. They suggest how vital and valuable it is for any company to communicate its rationale for CSR initiatives with employees. Also implied is the importance of communicating to employees the main CSR initiatives and programs which the company is carrying out and standing for. The communication of CSR initiatives to employees establishes a deep trustful relationship between the company and its employees. Collier and Esteban (2007) explain why companies need to convince their employees that they are serious about CSR. Employees are the ones who carry the main burden of responsibility for implementing ethical corporate behaviour in the daily working life of the company. Thus, achievements in CSR outcomes will largely depend on employee willingness to collaborate. Employees must be given information about the com-

pany, its activities, goals, and directions, as well as be allowed to have appropriate channels through which to pass relevant information up to management (Rodwell *et al.*, 1998).

Therefore, creating a culture of change and responsibility starts with HR. Jones (1995) considers that mutual relationships between corporations and employees will generate a homogeneous and integrative culture of socially responsible practices. Committed and dedicated employees are important for such environments to flourish and this is particularly an issue for HR managers. For instance, if employees don't see the point of CSR initiatives or understand the message, these initiatives are unlikely to be helpful in embodying the culture of social consensus (CIPD, 2003). There is growing evidence that good HR practices go a long way to encourage employee commitment and alleviate the gaps in the delivery of CSR (Collier and Esteban, 2007).

2- Diversity Management

Managing diversity in the workplace is a challenging opportunity for HR due to the increasing importance of socially responsible investment in this area. CSR practices are increasingly keen on managing diversity. This commitment is part and parcel of the internal responsibility of corporations. Senior management faces a wide range of demands for CSR actions from different segments of society. Issues surrounding diversity management make claims on the attention of the contemporary business manager (Husted, 2003). These issues gain even more importance in the frame of stakeholder theory. Matten (2003, p. 110) notes that "stakeholder theory claims that the corporation has a responsibility to all those groups who are harmed by, or benefit from, the company and/or whose rights will be affected either positively or negatively." Accordingly, all stakeholders including employees are citizens in respect of corporations.

In this sense, the question raised is how can corporations be accountable for diversity issues? In its green paper *Promoting a European Framework for Corporate Social Responsibility*, the European Commission (2001) suggests that relevant measures should be taken into account when dealing with CSR and work place diversity interrelated issues. These measures include; for example, equal pay and equal job opportunities and promoting cultures of inclusiveness and empowerment. According to the European Commission, CSR policies and plans can boost employees' morale and career advancement through innovative practices aiming to promote workplace diversity.

It is therefore becoming difficult to separate the dynamic interaction of an organisation's corporate social responsibility and its effective diversity management (Worman, Bland and Chase, 2005). In this context, HR has a major role to play in relation to diversity management. HR practices and plans "promote personal and professional employee development, diversity at all lev-

els and empowerment" (Lockwood, 2004). Conversely, one of the most highly-cited categorizations of CSR dimensions is the one used by Bhattacharya and Sen (2004) in which employee diversity features as one of the six CSR dimensions as sourced from Socrates, the corporate social ratings monitor published by KLD Research.

Accordingly, considering CSR in the context of managing workplace diversity is very important. Through good diversity management, the HR unit has a significant contribution to make to manage risk in organisations. For example, the role of HR is to preserve diversity on the grounds of race, religion, age or sex. Else, discrimination "can lead to employment tribunal claims which can be highly damaging to the organisation" (CIPD, 2003, p.4). In other words, diversity management is a serious concern and HR has the potential to play a significant role in developing CSR programs aimed at managing this diversity. Diversity practices and consistent treatment of all employees is a priority area for HR which also coincides in turn very closely with an internal CSR agenda.

Workforce diversity must be addressed and more knowledge and expertise need to be leveraged in order to manage diversity effectively and successfully. Thus, "HR must be aware that effective CSR means respect for cultural and developmental differences and sensitivity to imposing values, ideas and beliefs when establishing global HR policies and programs" (Lockwood, 2004, p.8). When CSR is included in the role of the HR unit, corporations can announce and maintain their intentions in relation to a better focus on diversity management.

The following are some facts regarding the changes taking place in the environment of diversity management (Worman *et al.*, 2005, p. 29):

- Between 2002 and 2010, the forecast is that the population aged 55–64 will increase by about 1.4 per cent per year.
- The number of women in employment has risen significantly since the beginning of the last decade.
- Flexible working practices are increasing, particularly for women but also for men. This is inevitable in the light of 24/7 consumer market delivery and meeting changing employee expectations and is key for organisations working in the global marketplace.
- The costs of childcare and inadequate provision prevent many women from working.
- Women are now returning to work in months, rather than years, after childbearing.
- Caring responsibilities make it difficult for many people to work full-time.

- Not all new graduates are in their early 20s.
- More people acquire disabilities as they get older than are born with them.

These facts have vital implications in any CSR-HR interface. Diversity management is at the core of any effective CSR strategy as more employees with different needs and expectations are seeking care and attention, given their important stakes in the firm. Good diversity management will raise employee awareness and understanding of what socially responsible preferences their corporations stand for. Good diversity management is also a prime HR concern, particularly in recent years with all the hype about effective diversity management and its link to the business case (Page, 2007). We expect diversity management to further attract increasing HR attention given recent trends towards more inclusive workplaces that appreciate and recognize the value of knowledge workers and human capital in a broad sense. There are thus important interfaces and room for complementarities between HR and CSR in this important area.

3- Community Relationships

The development and accumulation of social capital can flourish beyond internal CSR practices. Enhancing employee commitment to CSR and managing workplace diversity need to extend externally by showing support for the community. A corporation's relationships with its wider community can not develop in the absence of genuine internal responsible practices (Jamali *et al.*, 2008). Within corporations, HR activities and programs may give rise to a number of easily recognizable community issues. So, the role of the HR unit appears to be essential to communicate all socially responsible intentions and facilitate the integration of firms within their local communities (Zappala and Cronin, 2002).

Partnerships and alliances with the community are embedded in CSR (WBCSD, 2002). In fact, companies should realize that CSR initiatives can represent a strong opportunity and strategy to build symbiotic relationships with their communities. In the current competitive environment, companies may have strong community social concerns (Luo and Bhattacharya, 2006). Partnerships with communities constitute a move towards a more sustainable form of intervention which involves long-term commitments to communities (Tracey *et al.*, 2005). This will allow relationships between a company and its community to proceed on the basis of mutual advantage. For Tracey *et al.* (2005), community partnerships represent a move away from traditional distant linkages which characterized relationships between corporations and community groups.

Therefore, community involvement is a priority issue for any CSR program or activity. According to the WBCSD (2000), community involvement is considered

to be part of a company's core values. The WBCSD dialogue session about community involvement noted the following:

- Community relations should include a focus on core business impacts and interactions as well as on more traditional philanthropy
- Companies must deal with the tension between the priorities of different communities, such as those of employees and local residents
- Top management must make a sincere effort to understand community concerns and let the community know that their concerns are taken seriously by the company
- Building trust with the community demands consistency and long term commitment from the company.

HR professionals can link all these objectives to CSR given the responsibility of HR for managing key contacts and relationships in internal and external firm environments (Schuler and Jackson, 2006). The development of mutual relationships with the community is particularly relevant for HR units, which are increasingly called upon to know the business and exercise influence, solve problems, and design effective systems to ensure sustainability. As HR becomes a strategic partner in building effective CSR-community programs, HR will play a larger role in the overall CSR strategies not just in formulating the concepts but also in terms of actual implementation. HR can, thus, be effectively involved in creating effective community intervention programs and implementing them.

In closing, one of the most visible CSR initiatives is community relations. Strong community relations can have a positive impact on company reputation and brand. HR can also get involved given its stakeholder management and boundary scanning skills. In order for this role to mature, HR professionals need to nurture a deep understanding of internal and external stakeholders, including local community (Krishnan and Balachandran, 2004). HR can also in the process link critical issues—decreasing turnover, savings on cost per hire and attracting talented individuals—to CSR and the bottom line. There are many other avenues that HR leaders could explore to match both company and community needs. This represents therefore a third important interface and potential for collaboration between HR and CSR champions in this important area.

DISCUSSION

The framework presented in Figure 1 summarizes the three CSR-HR interfaces relating to employee communication and engagement, diversity management and community relationships. What is clear in Figure 1 is that human resource management can play an impor-

tant mediating role in bridging the gap between CSR objectives and plans, and actual implementation and outcomes at the level of employee engagement, diversity management and community development. The quicker HR gets involved and accepts responsibility the easier it will be to achieve aspired goals set out for CSR, which also should in theory complement HR priorities as outlined above. There is little doubt that the involvement of HR is both timely and needed and can make a real difference in terms of enhancing the success of CSR plans and aspirations. It is a real challenge for HR units to deal with complexities related to employee management and community relationship. However, HR's leadership and contribution to CSR can help address these complexities and develop creative potential interventions and approaches.

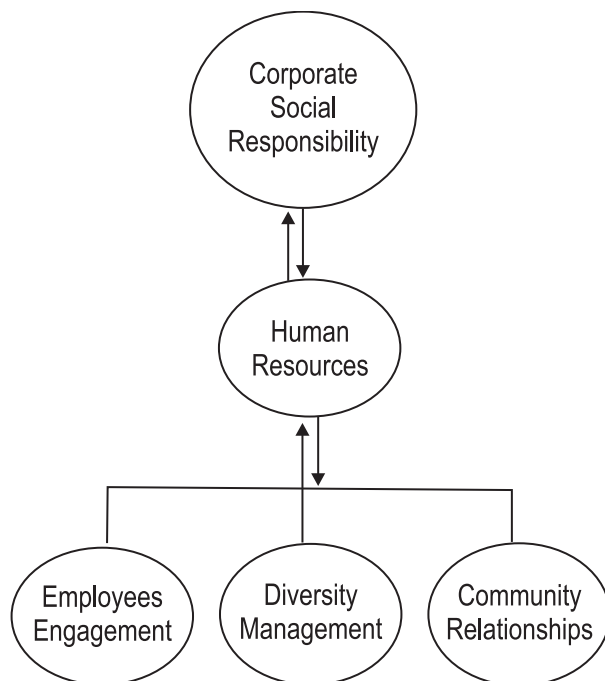


Figure 1- HR-CSR Interfaces

The CSR framework and mediating HR role outlined above correspond closely in turn to the recent characterization of HR as an agent of change within changing HR priorities and agendas (Ulrich, 1997). As an agent of change, HR must go beyond designing and delivering HR processes efficiently, to focus on managing employee contribution, fostering employee commitment, managing culture, and increasing strategic fit and integration. These new roles of HR are increasingly advocated in the SHRM paradigm. HR professionals must therefore show genuine leadership, and gain credibility, through patience, sensitivity, trustworthiness and equal attention to the needs of internal and external stakeholders in the framework of a holistic approach that is concerned with the total interest of the business (Schuler

and Jackson, 2006). The three interfaces discussed above become most relevant therefore in the context of a more organic and strategic HR orientation. In the process, HR needs to define what it actually means to be strategic.

A recent SHRM study suggests along these lines that HR should be more involved in implementing corporate social responsibility strategies than in creating them. HR professionals are able to align organizational corporate social responsibility strategies with practices by communicating the organization's corporate social responsibility strategy to employees and supporting the community through encouraging their participation in corporate social responsibility programs. "HR can engage employees in corporate social responsibility through educating employees about the organization's corporate social responsibility strategy and its importance, and soliciting employee ideas and feedback regarding programs and activities that support the organization's corporate social responsibility mission" (SHRM, 2007 p. 31). As HR becomes more of a strategic partner in organizational business plans, HR professionals will play a larger role in corporate social responsibility strategy from conception to application.

HR is gaining worldwide value as a business tool and social effort. It is becoming more and more an important part of company brand. Thus, HR professionals are invited to become more involved in corporate social responsibility initiatives (Schramm, 2007). According to Schramm (2007), the growing role for HR professionals in promoting social behaviour may lead to the expansion of the HR role in promoting at the same corporate social responsibility. Therefore, HR managers should determine the limits, responsibility or otherwise, of core values and beliefs. They should especially consider how these limits will affect employees, the organization and the wider community. We believe however as presented above that these limits are gradually expanding, and that accordingly HR will have a more prominent role to assume in different aspects of the company but also importantly in relation to CSR and the three critical areas of 1) employee contribution, 2) diversity management and 3) community relationships.

CONCLUSION

In his report *Making CSR Happen: The Contribution of People Management*, Redington (2005) recommends that HR will often be the function best able to contribute to the alignment of the behaviors and attitudes that successful CSR initiatives need. It is thus important for the HR unit to delve more deeply into issues related to CSR. In this context, there is a great deal of evidence that good HR practices complement and enrich a firm's overall CSR orientation and drive. Along these lines, this paper has attempted to document the important role of HR in the

three areas relating to 1) employee communication and engagement, 2) diversity management and 3) community relationships. The paper makes the case for greater engagement of HR in CSR given its commitment to employees and community.

The study conducted by Redington (2005) similarly makes the argument that HR interventions can be more effectively channeled to complement existing CSR agendas. A key conclusion from this study is that HR professionals have a vital role to play in managing the changes required for CSR activities to succeed. It is very difficult to envisage how any CSR programs could be truly successful without an effective HR contribution (Redington, 2005). However, it should be reiterated here that achievements of CSR outcomes will largely depend in the first place on employee willingness to collaborate (Collier and Esteban, 2007). Being primarily responsible for managing different aspects of employee contributions and fostering commitment, HR is uniquely positioned to contribute to the CSR goals of the firm (Unit and York, 2005).

Employee issues indeed comprise an important part of the CSR responsibility and initiative. In a study concerning current CSR contributions, Vyarkarnam (1992) points out that taking care of employee schemes is essential for any CSR program to succeed. Also, Ledwidge (2007) recommends that molding corporate values consistent with CSR is a new challenge for HR. CSR is therefore concerned at some level with changing employee behaviors, attitudes and performance. This is where the HR function can make a significant contribution to the success of CSR plans (Emmott and Worman, 2008). The HR function is well placed to tackle key CSR management challenges. HR practices provide the tools to change behaviour and transform CSR aspirations into reality.

Based on the review presented in this paper, it is clear therefore that there are important synergies between CSR principles / initiatives and HR. HR is concerned with elaborating, promoting and strengthening the CSR philosophy within the workplace and aligning those in turn with community needs and aspirations. The role, voice and expertise of HR are important in setting the tone for the CSR agenda and putting it in the spotlight. The real challenge for many organizations going forward is to further embed the role of HR in CSR. Findings in this paper suggest that good HR practices facilitate and lubricate effective CSR initiatives. CSR is knocking on the door and it is for HR to answer the call or miss the opportunity.

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