

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY: THE KEY ROLE OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

Business organizations have waked up to the need for being committed towards Corporate Social Responsibility. But still majority have just been taking up some form of philanthropic activities for its stakeholders. Nurturing a strong corporate culture which emphasizes Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) values and competencies is required to achieve the synergistic benefits. The employees of an organization occupy a central place in developing such a culture which underlines CSR values and competencies. The present study, therefore, is an attempt to explore the engagement of human resource management professionals in undertaking Corporate Social Responsibility. It also suggests Human Resource Management to take a leading role in encouraging CSR activities at all levels. The combined impact of CSR and human resource activities, which reinforce desirable behavior, can make a major contribution in creating long term success in organizations.

Introducción

Business houses, right from the inception of human race, have been regarded as constructive partners in the communities in which they operate. Though they have been instrumental in creating employment, wealth, products and services, yet the pressure on business to play a role in social issues involving employees, stakeholders, society, environment, government etc. is continuously increasing. The society is questioning the existence of business houses, especially in the wake of the scandals and scams conducted by the business houses like UTI, Enron, and WorldCom. In response to it, the organizations around the globe are forced to wake up to the need for being committed towards Corporate Social Responsibility. Over the years this concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has gained unprecedented momentum in business and public debate and has become a strategic issue crossing the departmental boundaries, and affecting the way in which a company does business. It has become so important that many organizations have rebranded their core values to include social responsibility. Almost all corporate websites/ policies/reports talk about their endeavors for CSR which has become a way of ensuring that the organization is fulfilling all the obligations towards society and thus is eligible for the license to operate. It assures that the organization can grow on sustainable basis.

These activities of CSR ranging from small donations to bigger projects for social welfare sustainable practices differ from organization to organization depending on the resources available to an organization for undertaking sustainable practices. Business practices of big and successful companies, with plenty of resources at their end, have set the trend for being committed to

sustainable practices. Such business houses around the globe show their commitment to social responsibility. In India, the initiatives of Dabur India Limited, for example, which commenced 'Sundesh' in 1993, a non-profit organization, with an aim to promote research and welfare activities in rural areas are appreciable. On the same track to fulfill its urge to do something for community, Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited has adopted 37 villages as their responsibility to develop in all walks of life. It has made efforts to make them self-reliant, provided them fresh drinking water, sanitation facilities, medical facilities, vocational training and literacy camps. (<http://www.karmayog.org/csr500companies>). Around its industrial facilities, Tata Group has created towns and cities like Jamshedpur, Mithapur, Babrala for the benefit of its employees. Cadbury India, Glaxo and Richardson Hindustan are some of the companies which are helping farmers to grow crops which in turn shall serve as raw materials for them (Tripathi & Reddy, 2006).

Although the implementation of such activities involves time, effort and resources yet the business houses have realized that it (CSR) is one of the important ways in which an organization can distinguish itself from its competitors. The tangible and intangible benefits associated with for organization are immense. A powerful tool like CSR not only enhances the brand image and reputation of the business but also leads to improvement in sales and customer loyalty, and increased ability to attract and retain employees. By capitalizing on it, the organizations can improve their financial performance and attract more investment with immense economic value. The word CSR has, as a result, occupied very important place in the plans and strategies of the organizations in the present era.

But still there are numerous organizations which understand CSR as undertaking some donations or philanthropic activities. Rather in its true sense CSR constitutes a strong commitment to social obligations and internalization throughout the organizational culture which lays emphasis on the execution of the obligations towards the employees and involving them in responsible endeavors. However from the very beginning the key player in undertaking such activities in the organizations has been top management and it has been the driving force in the area of social responsibility. Employees have been rarely covered under the ambit of CSR. To ensure organization-wide commitment, non-management workforce has to be involved in the process. This involvement of employees speaks of the strategic contribution of Human Resource Management (HRM) in CSR. In this context, the responsibility of human resource management department for encouraging sustainable practices that offer practically and theoretically new opportunities is very much.

So the present composition is an attempt to find out that how the staff can become the brand ambassadors of the organizations and that “feel good factor” can permeate out to others, especially customers and clients. To commensurate that it will try to suggest a plan of action by analyzing the CSR activities of various organizations to promote sound corporate citizenship which is necessary for the development of a culture for social responsibility. Divided into three sections, the present study shall put light on the studies emphasizing the involvement of human resources in socially responsible endeavors in Section I. Section II proposes suggestions on internalizing social responsibility by underlining the contribution of Human Resource (HR) and Section III concludes the study.

Literature Review

Different researchers at different points of time have emphasized the critical importance of HR for the proper implementation of CSR and the role that HR can play in developing the process where the business objectives are assessed and values re-aligned to match them with staff expectations.

Greening & Turban (2000) found that job applicant and employee perceptions of a firm's CSR determines their attractiveness towards the organizations. Moving on the same track Cropanzano et al (2001) demonstrates that employee attitudes and behaviors are heavily influenced by fairness of organizational actions towards them. In a survey conducted by Cherenson group, a New Jersey based public relations and recruitment ad agency; in 2002 found that the most important factors affecting the reputation of an organization as a place to work in are the way the employees are treated and the quality of its products and services (http://www.hrmguide.net/usa/commitment/employer_branding). Further Good relationships with employees also allows a company to gain additional benefits including improving their public image, increasing employee morale, and support from the community (Zappala and Cronin, 2002). Nancy (2004) while discussing the role of HR in developing CSR culture in organizations emphasized that with the growing importance of human capital as a success factor for today's organizations, the role of HR leadership has become more critical in leading and educating organizations on the value of CSR and how best to strategically implement CSR policies and programmes domestically and abroad. In view of this 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 programmes.

Redington (2005) with the help of twelve case studies, while underlining the HR professionals' key role in managing the changes required for CSR activities to succeed, stated that employees are the most neglected though most important stakeholder of the organization for conducting CSR activities. While accentuating on this issue he said that having a good reputation socially implies that a company's behaviour towards its people is consistent and is of a particular standard in which they are valued in as much as the external stakeholders. Rupp et.al (2006) accentuated that CSR plays a role about fostering positive social relationships between organizations and communities. They highlighted that employees will turn to CSR to assess the extent to which their organization values such relationships and so high levels of CSR can meet employees' need for belongingness with the organization and the society. A survey by Sirota Survey Intelligence (2007) affirmed that employees who are satisfied with their organization's commitment to social and environmental responsibilities are likely to be more positive, more engaged and more productive than those working for less responsible employers and when employees are positive about their organizations' CSR commitment, their engagement rises to 86 per cent. On the other hand, when employees are negative about their employer's CSR activities, only 37 per cent are highly engaged. Similarly, Murray (2008) on the basis of survey stated that more than one-third of respondents pointed that working for a caring and responsible employer was more important than the salary they earned and nearly half would turn away from an employer that lacked good corporate social responsibility policies.

However Fenwick & Bierema (2008) has pointed that HR department, which has the potential to play a significant role in developing CSR activities within the organization, found to be marginally involved or interested in CSR. Mehta (2003), in a survey, found that only 13 per cent of the companies involved their employees in undertaking the various CSR activities. Moreover, the employees have also been less likely to fully internalize the corporate culture (Rupp, et. al, 2006). The implementation of the CSR policy has also traditionally been in the hands of 'management' and 'employees' as the non-management workforce have been less likely to be involved in developing and implementing a policy on business responsibility towards society. There are large variations in the understanding of CSR in the head office and the local plant or sales office of an organization (Young, 2006). The perceptions of workers and management also differ about whether an organization is complying with such regulations as related to labour or working conditions (Mehta, 2003).

Agarwal (2007) stated that with the adoption of HR policies, such as, periodic review of employee performance, adequate training for the workforce and career advancement norms for its personnel, creating motivation, and commitment in the workforce the organization can reap the full business benefits and become successful to the great satisfaction of all its stakeholders. This is also reinforced by Malakarjunan (2006). Emphasizing upon such dimensions Krishnan & Balachandran (2004) pointed out the role of HRM in incorporating responsible practices within an organization. It is due to the lack of involvement of employees and failure to embed the socially responsible values into the organizational culture that many CSR initiatives inevitably fail and they

just become an exercise in public relations (Mees & Bonham, 2004).

The above verdicts of different researchers at different points of time entail that no doubt they have underscored the role of employee involvement through HR in various socially responsible initiatives of organization. But they have paid little attention on this aspect that how the internalization of CSR culture can happen with the initiatives of HR department of organization. How the company's values and policies for corporate responsibility can be reflected through various HR functions and consequently how the HR function can be a powerful agent in effecting company-wide progress in its CSR performance. With this backdrop in mind present study has designed.

Internalizing CSR: Initiatives of HRM

The role of HR function in embedding the CSR values in the corporate culture is immense and has been underlined also. An organization can exhibit a better image in the minds of people by presenting itself as an excellent employer which cares for its people and involves them in the ambit of social responsibility. This involvement of employees indicates the strategic importance of HRM in the CSR initiatives of an organization. Human Resource policies, forming the framework for the culture in the business management, create awareness towards the need to achieve the business goals in the best possible and ethical manner (Agrawal, 2007). With the help of HR functions, the socially responsible values can be inculcated and sustained in the organizational culture through the following ways:

- The HR department should take the responsibility to develop a formal

policy on sustainable practices involving employees. British gas, for example, used employee volunteering as a vehicle to achieve business-driven culture. The success of the initiative led to the development of a formal policy on employee volunteering. The company developed the 'Cardiff Cares' volunteering initiative with the purpose of encouraging employees to raise funds and donate some of their time to the local community (Redington, 2005). Employee fundraising was a way to show support for the local community, to build positive team spirit in the organization and to create a 'winning' environment at the workplace. The managing director and the HR team's strong commitment enabled the initiative to be a big success improving the employee retention levels and employee satisfaction.

- The orientation programme of newly recruited candidates should be designed in a manner that corporate philosophy about CSR gets highlighted. The commitment of top management towards CSR is very important which should be expressed in tangible terms to reinforce the right kind of behavior in the organization. Wipro, for example, inculcates CSR values amongst its workforce right at the beginning during the induction process (<http://www.developednation.org/interviews>). Corporate presentations, keeping employees updated through mails, regular newsletters are the instruments used to keep employees energized about the organization's socially responsible initiatives.
- The designing of Performance Management System should be done in such a manner that it measures the

socially responsible initiatives taken by employees. This becomes important as the internalization of CSR in an organizational culture requires that appropriate behaviors get appraised, appreciated as well as rewarded. Otherwise, the organization might fail to inculcate it amongst all employees due to lack of positive reinforcement.

- The Training facilities may also be made available to instill the CSR culture among employees. This becomes necessary to make employees learn and practice CSR activities. The training of employees through “CSR Living Our Values Learning Tool” at Cadbury Schweppes (Young, 2006), the major global beverage and confectionary organization, has been a good example of partnership between HR and CSR. The company has also included social responsibility in the latest management development initiatives like the global “Passion for People” management skills programme.
- Empowerment of managers by giving them decision-making authority shall help in executing social responsibility at local level. It becomes important when an organization with plants or units at multiple locations around the world operate. Armed with decision making authority, the managers will be able to appreciate and assess the needs. Therefore, the employees may be appropriately authorized to encourage initiative in the area of social responsibility. Clear reporting and review mechanisms may be put in place in the organization which shall improve the focus and effectiveness of CSR (Mehta, 2003) .
- Code of ethics of an organization can stimulate social responsibility to a great extent reinforcing amongst its employees the underlying values. Training on code of ethics should be undertaken by the organization. Best Buy, a fortune 100 company and the largest specialty retailer of consumer electronics in the United States and Canada, has initiated ethics training for its employees. Electronic Data Systems (EDS) has a global CSR strategy which is well supported by HR function and the employees (Redington, 2005). The HR department of the company has also developed an e-learning course for its employees built around the Department of Trade and Industry, CSR Competency framework.
- Responsible Human Resource Management practices on equal opportunities, diversity management, whistle blowing, redundancy, human rights, harrasment shall give credibility to the CSR initiatives of the organization. It is beyond doubt that protecting human rights such as denial or prevention of legal or social rights of workers is a very important issue under CSR. Companies like Wipro, Infosys, Dabur, and ICICI have even framed whistle blowing policy, providing protection to the employees who come to know about any unethical practice going on within the organization, covering a whole gamut of subjects and showing their positive approach towards unethical practices.
- The separation of employees during mergers, acquisitions, downsizing etc. should be strategically aligned with the business strategy as well as Corporate Social responsibility. Retraining, retention, redeployment of people

can be worked out with aggressive communication, information campaigns and outplacement services in place to assist the transition of people from the organization. Hindustan Unilever Limited (HUL), for example, provided outplacement services to the employees of its foods division at Bangalore when they were unable to move to Mumbai in 2006. Over 60 firms and 25 placement agencies were contacted by the company to arrange for multiple job interviews for a number of employees (<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow>)

- Social Reports or Sustainability Reports should be prepared to underline the organization's commitment to social or sustainable practices. In India, the top management, in their messages, speeches to shareholders and in annual reports has been resorting to social reporting but it should be made more formal in nature (Bhatia, 2005 & Raman, 2006). Tata Steel Limited, for example, has been preparing Sustainability Reports under the stringent guidelines of Global Reporting Initiatives, 2002 on economic, environment and social performance (<http://www.tatasteel.com/corporatesustainability>).
- The Human Resource department should effectively measure and evaluate CSR activities. The value added by CSR in the form of direct results, such as, economic savings and indirect results like increase in employee satisfaction, less employee turnover, measured by staff attitude surveys, shall indicate contribution to improved business performance. There is also a need to conduct periodic review of the CSR activities. CurAlea Management Consultants Pvt. Ltd.

(2007) has suggested for conduction of periodically an independent internal review or audit of the effectiveness of CSR programmes (http://www.curalea.com/pdf/curalea_approachpaperforauditofcsr).

Conclusion

Successful programmes on social responsibility rely heavily on enlightened people management practices. In this context HR department is assumed to be the coordinator of CSR activities in getting the employment relationship right which is a precondition for establishing effective relationships with external stakeholders and thus can orient the employees and the organization towards a socially responsible character. There is also an increasing trend in the corporate sector which has started leveraging upon employees and their management for exhibiting their commitment towards CSR. Armed with a strong and committed organizational culture reinforced by responsible Human Resource Management practices, the organizations can achieve heights of success by improved profitability, employee morale, customer satisfaction, legal compliance and societal approval for its existence. It is high time for all other organizations which have been paying only lip service to CSR that they must capitalize upon the existing Human Resource Department in framing such practices, procedures and policies that ensure the internalization of quality, ethics and excellence in the whole system. By doing this they can sensitize the employees and the whole organization towards CSR without adding any additional cost.

To recapitulate it can be said that companies have increasingly felt the need to co-ordinate their CSR activities and demonstrate their commitment to social

responsibility. But delivery, not rhetoric, is the key in developing the trust of external stakeholders for any organisation and it cannot be done without beginning charity at home. To do that social responsibility needs to be embedded in an organisation's culture to bring change in actions and attitudes in which Human Resource can play a significant role. Otherwise, CSR may run the risk of being categorised as shallow 'window-dressing'.

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