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This is the published version of a paper published in .

Citation for the original published paper (version of record):

Macassa, G. (2019)

Integrated corporate social responsibility and human resources management for stakeholders health promotion

South Eastern European Journal of Public Health

<https://doi.org/10.4119/seejph-2373>

Access to the published version may require subscription.

N.B. When citing this work, cite the original published paper.

Permanent link to this version:

<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:hig:diva-32131>

SHORT REPORT

Integrated corporate social responsibility and human resources management for stakeholders health promotion

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Abstract

In the past decade, there has been an argument for the inclusion of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in models and business strategies. However, the conversion of CSR strategy into actual managerial practices and outcome values remains an issue of ongoing debate as well an important challenge for business organizations. Furthermore, still is very little discussion on how business will influence stakeholder's health promotion and surrounding environment as means to help address society's most pressing challenges.

This paper discusses the potential of public health literacy in advancing stakeholders' health promotion beyond the workplace. The discussion argues that integrating corporate social responsibility (CSR) and human resources management (HRM) is an effective strategy to achieve social sustainability in organizations in which stakeholders' health and well-being are important components.

This short report describes an integrated CSR-HRM and describes how it can facilitate public health literacy. In the era of sustainable development, there is a need to discuss how business organizations can strategize to enhance internal and external stakeholders' health and well-being.

Keywords: corporate social responsibility, human resources management, public health literacy, stakeholders' health.

The corporate social responsibility–human resources management nexus

Background

In the past decade, there has been an argument for the inclusion of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in models and business strategies (1-3). However, as suggested by Jamali et al. (1), the conversion of CSR strategy into actual managerial practices and outcome values remains an ongoing challenge for many organizations (1). Various authors argue that human resources management (HRM) can provide interesting and dynamic support to CSR strategy design, implementation, and delivery (1-3).

Although the definition of CSR has been debated (4-9), there is agreement about its implementation and delivery. This short report defines CSR as the social obligation of business enterprises to impact society beyond pure profit maximization (1,10) through an institutionalized responsive approach translated into and aligned with managerial practices, including human resource management (1,11). With that approach, CSR can be seen as a planned process with strategic applications and links to the organization's mission and core competences (12-14). Several works have highlighted how CSR can increase organizational performance (15) through generating a sense of belonging and commitment among stakeholders (16,17). In addition to the evidence for CSR's beneficial effects on employees (18), the main argument here is that HRM could provide a managerial framework to support organizational efforts to translate CSR strategies into practical managerial actions and outcomes, especially within the internal organizational environment (2,19,20). Similar to CSR, HRM has been defined different ways, especially as it has evolved over time (21,22). There are also international differences in its definitions.

For instance, Kaufman argues that in the dominant American model, HRM is considered both a function and a process, thus making it difficult to disentangle from general management activities (23). In this short report I follow Watson (24) in defining HRM as 'institutions, discourses and practices focused on the management of people within an employment relationship enacted through networks comprising multiple public and private actors'. This definition allows us to understand HRM beyond its functional aspects, to consider both micro and macro levels of the phenomenon, and to expand the employer–worker dyad to include multiple institutions and stakeholders (24). HRM is seen to have capabilities and expertise in executing organizational strategies, participating in change management support and facilitation, and enhancing managerial efficiency and responsibility for learning, training, and development programmes to help to integrate CSR into an organization's culture. What makes its role all the more interesting and promising is that HRM is increasingly considered responsible not only for humanistic and social concerns, but also for adding value in a broader business sense (25,26).

HRM is expected to reach out to communities and society in general as well as to have an important role in the search for sustainable organizations (22). In addition, HRM has the potential to target sustainability at the dual dimension of work and home, as well as contribute to responsible leadership (RL) within organizations. This type of leadership is known to transcend the traditional binary leadership–employee relationship to emphasize multiple leader–stakeholder relationships, paying attention to all stakeholders as well as the environment. HRM can help to create a win–win environment for business organizations

and their multiple stakeholders (internal and external) through better alignment with the organization's mission and strategic direction (27,28). HRM thus appears to be well positioned to be more involved in helping firms to amplify their CSR efforts and achieve worthwhile and substantive outcome values (3).

Integrated human CSR-HRM for stakeholders' health promotion: the role of public health literacy

Socially responsible HRM, CSR, and promotion of stakeholder's health should be seen through the lens of stakeholder theory, in which the essence of business lies primarily in building and creating value for all stakeholders, internal and external (29,30). This theory helps to explain why is beneficial to integrate CSR with business management to advance the health and well-being of all stakeholders within and beyond the workplace (31). CSR is thus considered to be a process in which business organizations integrate social, ethical, environmental, and human rights and consumer concerns across its operations in order to maximize value for owners, stakeholders, and the broader society as well as identify, prevent, and mitigate potential adverse consequences on the environment (1,8,10). For instance, the introduction of socially responsible elements to daily management has been argued to legitimize companies' activities vis-à-vis the groups with which they interact: shareholders, partners, suppliers, customers, public institutions, nongovernmental organizations, employees, and society in general (32,33). From a health promotion perspective, this integration could be an important vehicle for disseminating strategies that support sustainable population health (34). I argue that CSR-HRM can be used within enterprises to implement stakeholders' literacy in health and well-being in both the workplace and the larger society.

Contrary to individual health literacy (which is a predictor to individual health outcomes), public health literacy is defined as the public's ability to make sound health decisions in the context of everyday life-at home, in the community, at the workplace, in the health care system, at the market place, and in the political arena (34). For instance, linking CSR and health literacy can encourage both business and civic engagement in health, thus creating a reciprocal responsibility to create workplaces in which employees can obtain the information they need to understand and act on both individual and public health concerns (35). Sorensen et al. argue that health literacy could benefit CSR through widening opportunities to promote new partnerships and resources for its progress (35). They also suggest that business can play an important role in spreading health literacy not only among employees, but also in society (35). Health literacy is important to business in ensuring the availability of a healthy workforce and its long-term sustainability, well-being, and performance (35,36). Health literacy in the workplace can also be both a catalyst for a long-term return on investment and a way for companies to educate their workforce on the importance of societal well-being and sustainability (37). Because public health literacy can be embedded in the company's strategic CSR-HRM, it can boost employees' knowledge and motivate them to make decisions important to their health, the working environment, and the health and well-being of others (including the natural environment).

Burmeister argues that modern companies cannot operate without considering the social consequences of their actions (38). Advancing public health literacy as a corporate strategic choice can fit the dynamic change from an add-on CSR to a built-in CSR, where social considerations are integrated into strategies and

operations. It can also stimulate the shift from value protection to value creation (including social value), with a focus on innovation and competitive advantage rather than risk and reputation management (38,39).

Using the CSR-HRM nexus to enhance public health literacy and stakeholders' health and well-being may not necessarily require additional resources from businesses. Instead, it might be accomplished using already available tools

and past efforts, but now coordinated with new CSR-HRM strategies and activities. Sustainable HRM in conjunction with CSR could then contribute to the sustainability of businesses through cooperating with top management, key stakeholders (e.g., government and health policy makers), and non-governmental organizations and realizing economic, ecological, social, and human sustainability goals.

Conflicts of interest: None.

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