

Corporate Social Responsibility, Sustainability, and Ethical Public Relations

Strengthening Synergies with Human Resources

THE CHANGING CONTEXT OF MANAGING PEOPLE

Edited by Professor Emma Parry, Cranfield School of Management, Swindon, UK

The past two decades have represented a time of unprecedented social, technological, and economic change that has required a transformation in human resource management (HRM). Shifts in demographics, continued increases in women in the workforce, and greater mobility across national borders have led to higher diversity in the workplace. Advances in technology, including social media, have enabled new ways of doing business through faster communications and vast amounts of data made available to all. Mobile technology with its ubiquitous connectivity has led to renewed concerns over work–life balance and extreme jobs. These and many other changes have seen evolving attitudes toward work and careers, leading to different expectations of the workplace and mean that existing ways of managing people may no longer be effective. This series examines in depth the changing context to identify its impact on the HRM and the workforce.

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Resources

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

For Dr. Steven Brem, M.D.

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Preface

Conceptually, the orientation of managers working in public relations (PR), human resources (HR), and corporate social responsibility or sustainability (CSR/S) are contextual and may be dramatically different from one another. Perhaps they converge, however, with regard to organizational *reputation*. Reputation management persists as one of an organization's most important jobs; one that drives an organization's need to acquire and maintain legitimacy in the eyes of key stakeholders (e.g., community, customers, employees, and investors). PR managers work to develop mutually beneficial stakeholder relationships that contribute to an organization's reputation, HR managers coordinate employee issues that impact on products/services provided, and CSR/S managers work to meet the needs of various stakeholders with regard to the organization's people–planet–profit impacts. Both PR and HR, as practice fields, have been around for several decades. CSR/S, however, is a relative newcomer to organizations, both for-profit and non-profit – with the success of CSR/S programs often measured according to how it (or its lack) plays out with regard to the organization's reputation.

How both sets of teams could work together has escaped scholarly inquiry for years. This book examines ways HR and PR may be charged to make CSR/S an integrated ingredient and ethical hallmark of organizational culture. How this dynamic plays out in the workplace and to what effect is the focus here. Authors from around the globe have pondered these issues and offer empirical findings.

CSR/S initiatives and specific activities contribute to an organization's brand management and overall reputation when internal and external stakeholders consider the work as contributing positively – in terms of attracting, recruiting, motivating, and retaining employees. The 11 chapters presented in this collection each address the overlap and differences among PR, HR, and

CSR/S from a variety of vantage points; many attending to employees as an important stakeholder group.

I was inspired to assemble this edited collection following earlier work in exploring ways that PR practitioners may serve as insider activists for inspiring organizations to become more responsible and sustainable (Pompper, 2015). Over the course of conducting hundreds of interviews and examining just as many organizations' websites, I came away feeling that too many corporations offer fluffy, vague mission statements about "protecting the environment," "hiring diverse employees," and "sustaining the planet" with no real measurement and what could be considered a good deal of "lip service." Hence, they all sound pretty much the same! To promote organizational reputation, employees are used for short-lived photo-op community volunteer activities, raking leaves and picking up trash while wearing brightly colored T-shirts and baseball caps featuring the company logo. The photos appear across social media and on company websites, annual and CSR/S reports, and sometimes community newspapers. Some employees find the events fulfilling, while others may feel (ab)used. What does a once-per-year employee community volunteer activity do long term to substantively advance an organization's CSR/S mission anyway? Even nonprofit organizations that partner with for-profit corporations for CSR/S projects worry that they may be exploited for corporate gain; to put a good face on corporate shortcomings.

To begin, I explore a long-time rivalry between internal PR and HR departments – with accusations of encroachment – by exploring why both sets of professionals must find ways to work together with the aim of navigating organizations toward authentic CSR/S.

Lipschultz examines sustainability by considering the employee engagement movement as mapped across Twitter data in order to identify centers of social influence in which content travels through key accounts during sharing.

Bradford expands the critical social theory of youth empowerment framework by exploring representations of urban youth conservation–environmental empowerment. She conducted a textual analysis of three organizations' websites so that she could examine how corporate communicators and HR professionals can champion volunteer activities and youth engagement as evidence of CSR/S commitment.

Heinrich uses excellence theory and interviews with PR, HR, and CSR/S managers to explore how Michigan-based for-profit

corporations use CSR initiatives to attract, engage, and retain job-seeking Millennials.

Wood, Berger, and Roberts use social identity theory to undergird an ethnography conducted at a benefit corporation (B-corporation) – Cotopaxi, an outdoor company that produces backpacks and clothing through partnerships with indigenous communities around the globe as a means of alleviating poverty and promoting sustainable business practices – to study shared values of the corporation and its volunteer employees representing cultures in India, Samoa, South Sudan, Nigeria, and the United States.

Dusingize and Nyiransabimana offer a case study based on interviews with key employees to investigate university social responsibility (USR) practices within Institut Catholique de Kabgayi in Rwanda and to advance understanding of ways USR is defined against a post-genocide history.

Oshin-Martin applies the theory of open social innovation, using the case study research method, to reveal complementary roles that HR and PR may play in creating a transparent and authentic CSR program that builds community relations and value for internal and external stakeholders in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Bourland-Davis and Beverly L. Graham use a communication audit research method to examine how CSR can be an integral part of organizational culture – based on employee interviews and content analysis of newsletters produced by a healthcare facility during a major change; an opportunity to examine interplay among PR, HR, and CSR/S management.

Howes offers an essay examining why companies create special hiring programs for military veterans and Olympic athletes to demonstrate how close coordination between HR and PR can help personalize CSR.

Stokes uses social exchange theory to highlight dangers associated with not being able to activate CSR values among employees during legitimacy controversies; specifically Mylan's mishandling of the EpiPen controversy which widened its legitimacy gap among internal and external stakeholder groups.

Strauss considers the relationship between CSR and PR in the gaming industry and suggests ways to motivate employees in order to recruit a more diverse and dedicated workforce; a CSR goal at MGM Resorts International. She considers the particular challenges of communicating with employees in a vice industry and suggests what HR managers can learn from these efforts to combine CSR with employee engagement.

As a whole, this book advances an argument for HR–PR department cooperation in fulfilling an *organizational conscience* role for navigating for-profits and nonprofits toward greater social responsibility and sustainability to benefit people and planet; an outcome that ultimately may support the profit motive (for corporations) by positively enhancing its reputation. The CSR and sustainability literatures are rife with theory building and critique. This is useful, but it is time to incorporate practical advice and case studies that may serve as a foundation for later hypothesis testing and theory building. We need to provide evidence and guidance to for-profit and nonprofit organizations about how to make CSR/S happen. One way to do this is through building authentic relationships with employees for common goals in advancing organizations as *real* leaders in protecting the planet and in respecting people. We believe this edited collection begins the work in earnest.

As part of regular operations, PR and HR departments may work closely when managing and communicating with employees. However, usually, the communication flow is top-down. Support of employees as a key stakeholder group by the HR function, generally, has assumed a top-down management perspective. Meanwhile, PR increasingly is viewed as a publicity function in organizations – even though PR’s attention to employees as a key stakeholder group with valuable perspectives resonates with a two-way symmetrical communication model standpoint.

To create more socially responsible, sustainable, ethical – and reputable – organizations, communication flow must be organic and two-way. Nowhere is there a confluence of these concepts that is more relevant today than in a context of empowering organizations to meet their CSR/S goals and commitments beyond maximizing profit for stockholders. Findings presented in these chapters offer practical advice for working with employees to build organizations with responsibility and sustainability built in – based on HR and PR departments working together as *organizational conscience* touchstone.

Reference

Pompper, D. (2015). *Corporate social responsibility, sustainability, and public relations: Negotiating multiple complex challenges*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Foreword

Over the past 20 years or so, we have seen a change in the emphasis of organizations, away from a focus that is purely related to economic outcomes to a recognition that businesses should also pay attention to social and environmental outcomes – leading to the creation of what has been called the “triple bottom line.” Alongside this shift, has been the development of the concept of “corporate social responsibility” (CSR) whereby companies address areas of environmental and social concern while also maintaining their focus on shareholders and other stakeholders. As part of this movement, we have seen most large corporations recognize the need to consider elements of environmental and social sustainability and to align these aims with their broader corporate goals.

Despite this shift, however, and the resulting trail of academic research concerning CSR and sustainability within organizations, there has been little focus on the relationship of these aspects to human resource management (HRM). This is despite the fact that the human resource function surely has an essential role in integrating CSR within the culture of an organization. I am therefore very pleased to include this book, which focuses exactly on aligning HRM with CSR and sustainability, in my book series. This text provides a contemporary and fascinating investigation of the relationship between CSR and HRM and how the two can work together to produce positive outcomes for the organization, including the attraction and retention of talent, social innovation, and employee engagement. I hope you will all enjoy reading this book as much as I have.

Emma Parry
Series Editor