

More than a Band-Aid

The unrealised potential of HR in CSR

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Abstract: In the turbulent scenario that the corporate world operates much effort are being put to ensure sustainability of the organization. The once merry time singers are blowing a whistle to ensure organizational alertness to meet this demand. Once the great orators are now being turning to good communicators as the stakeholders are becoming more aware of their rights and the impact organization are having directly and indirectly on them.

If we go by the much used cliché, charities begin at home and apply it to the corporate world. Than that would surely means to change internally to reflect externally. And who would be in a better position to do this than the HRM department of any organization. Playing a central role in the organizational structure and linking all the other departments HR managers can play an instrumental role in making their organizations more aware about their social and environmental responsibilities. Holding an important power to exert over key processes and systems HR department can actually guide the organization towards sustainable practices that ensures employee engagement, employer branding and attracting & retaining key talent. Rather than using the HR department as a band-aid solution for the growing pressure to adopt CSR activities organisations should focus to cultivate the latent capability of HR department and the role it can play to use CSR activities as a competitive advantage.

Keywords: Human Capital, HRM, strategic HRM, CSR, Sustainability, Competitive Advantage

I INTRODUCTION

In the light of increased wakefulness both amongst the stakeholders as a unit and the society as a whole, corporate social responsibility has not remained as an optional add on service, rather it has become a core competency to succeed in the tough competition. While marketing and finance department of an enterprise shoulders the responsibility of generating profits and utilizing resources efficiently, it's the Human resource department that should proactively look towards the welfare of the human resource working within the organization as well as the society. The human resource professionals have to play a key role in cultivating socially responsible culture as well as developing policies and strategies that would make organization a responsible entity.

Much research has been conducted on the topic broadly defined, but the function and responsibility of human resource department in the CSR arena is still unexplored [1]. The direct and indirect contributions by the HR department through CSR activities are still uncharted. There is still visible reluctance by

the organisations to give due importance to its intangible assets.

Although significant guidance is available to firms who desire to be the best place to work and for firms who seek to manage employee issues in a socially responsible way, there is a dearth of information for the HR manager to embed their firm's CSR values throughout the organization. The corporate failures such as Enron make all too clear, organizations that focus on PR over and above CSR runs the risk of damaging their corporate reputation if not their demise.

A. CSR = the new rule of the game

Undoubtedly business house have always been regarded as constructive partners in the communities in which they operate. Though they act as a catalyst in employment generation, wealth creation and the production of goods and services yet the pressure on business organisations to play an active role in social issues involving stakeholders, is continuously increasing. Of late, business has come to realize that enterprises are born out of the society and therefore should serve it for their own progressive provisions. Drawing the various resources from the society it becomes responsible to share the burden of the society, to mentor the community and also to enrich it. In this regard, an increasing number of enterprises have embraced a culture of CSR [2].

The race for organisational survival is getting fierce, and with monopolistic competition giving stakeholders wider spectrum of goods and services to choose, profits comes from mostly economies of scale a larger base of committed customer base. In this red ocean the global organisations and social media have given the power of information thus making the cake walk, the precarious cat walk. In such a scenario where the once ruled are becoming the rulers, corporate houses showing social responsibility is actually the strategic need of the hour.

With the level of awareness increasing amongst all the sectors of the society the responsibility of the business houses towards its stakeholders is being debated more aggressively. And the discussions definitely not remaining in the departmental constrains or the organisational constrains, rather a national and global issue. Organisations have reluctantly grasped the fact that just paying is not enough, it has to be something more than just repaying. Sharma 2009 in the research stated that it has become so important that many organizations have

rebranded their core values to incorporate social responsibility. Nearly all corporate websites/ policies/reports talk about their endeavours for CSR, which has become a way of ensuring that the organization is fulfilling its obligations towards society and as such is eligible for the license to operate thus assuring that the organization can grow on sustainable basis [3].

CSR has not remained as an optional “add-on service”. It is directly linked to the concept of sustainable development integrating economic scenario, social obligations and environmental requirements in its operations. CSR is voluntarily adopted. It is over and above legal requirements. The study by Kotler & Lee 2005 observed that the majority of the US Fortune 500’s company websites now have reports on CSR initiatives. Another executive study in 2000 found that “69% of companies planned to increase future commitments on social issues”[4]. Other researchers too noted that CSR provides a paradigm shift from the traditional organizational emphasis which were based solely on economic aspects to, incorporate broader stakeholders’ interests both within and outside the organization that can have long range repercussion affecting sustainability [5] [6] [7]. Other studies gave a more detailed and frank account of benefits that can be drawn by focusing on CSR activities. These researchers were of the view that CSR activities when inculcated within the organisation can facilitate an organisation to raise its legitimacy and reputation in the eyes of external stakeholders, such as customers, suppliers, financial backers, etc., which in return will lead to increased sales and revenues, and decrease the costs of materials and financing, while ensuring sustainability [8] [9] [10]. Let alone the tangible and intangible benefits associated with adopting efficient CSR activities, they can be used as an important distinguisher in the red ocean. 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 significant position in the plans and strategies of the organizations in the present era [3].

Thus providing a safe cushion in the times of emergencies and as a stepping stool at other times to elevate and set apart an organisation. Joseph 2009 in his research stated, the increasing importance of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), one that emphasizes social, and environmental dimensions in addition to financial ones (the Triple Bottom Line), has been widely recognized by both academia and business organizations [12].

B. HR = The untapped potential

HR being the linking pin within the organisation still misses the role it should be playing in the CSR activities. Its arena is yet to go beyond the documentation process. To the wake of the situation and more so as the global trend, organisations have adopted activities to show their commitment towards its stakeholders but still misses the true integration within its core values. Competition, global standards, government regulations and public awareness have actually cajoled the business houses to follow the leaders. But soft issues are still met with

difficulty with the soft tissues. As reported by Lockwood, to catch up with the competitors globally, HR leaders are developing and implementing incentive and appraisal systems that reflect sustainability as well as hiring recruits that exemplify these morals. For example, research by the Conference Board reveals that 50% of global managers report their companies do, or plan to, include corporate citizenship (aka CSR) as a performance evaluation category, additionally, 68% of respondents cite the link between corporate citizenship and performance appraisal as “increasingly important” [13]. What is interesting to note is the role of HR as a forefront leader and Champion of CSR is still missing. Other studies too state the restricted role of HR department, limiting its scope of activities to mostly documentation, more of recruiting and selecting, and might be of appraisal and evaluation.

Table I

Prior research showing Neglected involvement of HR department			
Year	Study	No of units	Findings
2011	SHRM 2011	700 companies corporate social responsibility (CSR) and HR professionals	only 6% of respondents confirmed that HR was involved in developing CSR strategy and 25% maintained that HR was involved in implementing CSR strategy. Yet, 89% of respondents said that CSR is important for attracting top talent, improving employee retention (85%) and developing the organization’s leaders (81%)[14].
2007	Chicago-based accounting firm	500 executives	environmental and sustainability issues were for operational departments rather than HR[15].
2008	Society of Human Resource Management (fox)	Pilot study	34% of HR respondents monitor the environmental aspect of business, which is one of the key dimensions of CSR [15].
2009	CSR one year on.	127 HR Directors,	even though most regarded HR as having an important role to play in addressing the opportunities and challenges presented by CSR, there was quite a gap in making this a reality[16].
2008	Hine and Preuss	Managerial Groups	found in their study of managers in organizations with CSR programs that the main motive for CSR was instrumental, that is, while CSR was seen as important, the allocation of resources still largely depended on how well the CSR initiatives supported commercial objectives [17].
2009	Fenwick and Bierema	Qualitative Study	that the HR development (HRD) area “appeared to be only marginally involved or interested in the firms’ CSR activities”, with the HRD managers in six of the eight firms studied saying that CSR was not relevant to their work [18].

2007	SHRM	NA	CSR leadership remains limited, piecemeal and anecdotal, as found in the SHRM study noted earlier: while nearly 2/3rds of HR professionals interviewed were directly involved in CSR activities, only 6% were mainly responsible for creating CSR strategy and only 17% were charged with implementing the strategy" [19].
2003	Mehta	NSE NIFTY Companies	The survey found that only 13 per cent of the companies involved their employees in undertaking the various CSR activities [20].
2006	Rupp, et. al,	Canada	The study found that the employees have been less likely to fully internalize the corporate culture [21]

- HR is responsible for many of the key systems and processes (e.g. recruitment, training, communications) on which effective delivery depends
- HR people have relevant knowledge and skills in relation to organizational learning and cultural change.
- Managing trust and risk raises fundamental issues about how people are managed.
- Employees are a key stakeholder in any CSR program" [23].

Another report, Developing the Global Leader of Tomorrow, emphasised that “a range of human resource levers are important for developing [CSR] organizational capabilities: building these knowledge and skills through leadership development programs, career development planning, succession planning, performance management and incentive systems and competency frameworks, and seeking these knowledge and skills when recruiting new talent into the organization” [24].

C. CSR-HR = PR

Adine Mees and Jamie Bonham [22], in Canadian Business for social responsibility stated that If employees are not betrothed, corporate social responsibility becomes an exercise in public relations. The credibility of an organization will be dented when it becomes apparent the company is not “walking the talk”. With HR department not fully involved or rather not leading the CSR activities just makes these activities more of random acts of kindness. To be used as a tool for ensured survival and sustainability it needs to acquire a much larger role of inculcating these activities in the organisational DNA. Without the people within the organisation truly involved and committed, these social acts of kindness looks superficial. The impression emerging from such a scenario is more of succumbing to the environmental pressure, rather than rising to meeting the environmental demands. And what follows is a string of questions , with a lot of things at stake.

D. CSR + HR= Sustainability

Over the past few decades, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has gained important as a strategic focus in today’s [13]. In response to increasing concerns of the stakeholder’s, organizations have been incorporating socially and environmentally oriented objectives into their responsibility framework to reinforce business strategy. The study by Inyang, stated that much research has been conducted on the topic broadly defined, but the role of human resources in the CSR arena is still a relatively new and unexplored area of study [1].

It is generally accepted amongst academicians as well as organisations that HR department should play a more dynamic function in the CSR activities. Now the question largely emerges as to how to integrate these two. Tuuk and Kwar has given CSR integration model showing the various degrees of HR involvement in the CSR Function.

Figure I

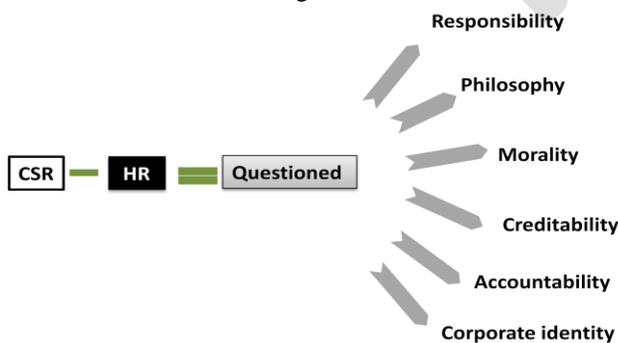


Figure II

Integration Models of the CSR Function



(Tuuk & Kwan, may 2012)

The report by CIPD in 2002 gave the following argument for HR people taking the CSR agenda seriously:

- Companies are increasingly required to take account of the impact of their activities on society.
- The credibility of CSR is dependent on delivery, not rhetoric.

Their study suggested that the organizations need to enable HR to serve as a steward of human assets within their operational frameworks. To enact real change within global communities, organizations will need to strengthen HR’s capacity to help employees become more proactive_ and integrated into their cultures of responsible leadership [25].

Having agreed till here the major question that follows is HOW ? That is how to house the CSR function within the HR department and enable the HR department to independently lead from the forefront. The known but not accepted method is through CSR led HR policies and socially responsible employees. These three will prove as the vital glue to club the two functions of the organisation.

Figure III



The three plus acts as cement to bind together ensuring more than just papers integration. And once inculcated in the DNA of an organisation it will lead to a more sustainable organisation. This will take care of the organizational concern regarding sustainability through corporate social responsibility. Moreover HR function is uniquely positioned to support in both developing and implementing a strategy which ensure sustainability. Proper HR policies can deal with both regulatory pressures and societal demands for greater environmental and social concerns.

The figure IV lists the key outcome of integrating CSR in the HR function, which directly indirectly leads to organisational sustainability.

Figure IV



E. CSR + HR + employees = Competitive Advantage

A lot of researches have been conducted on the role of CSR in contributing to the triple bottom line, employees, organisational culture , etc but studies which analyse the cumulative effect of CSR activities on various aspect of the organisation and study all of the points as a whole are few. This study tries to fill the gap by studying the previous researches on the role and impact of CSR on various facets of the organisation and establishing their role in providing competitive advantage to organisations.

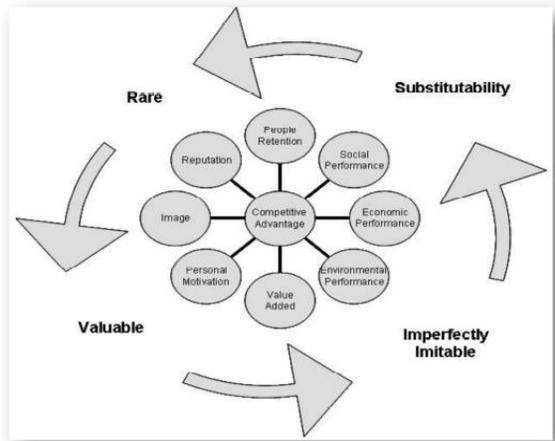
1) Positive relationship between HR + Employees + CSR

The aim of HRM is to use ways that assist in the development of innovative, flexible and dedicated workforce. These practices are referred to as High-Performance Work Systems (HPWS) or High Commitment Management (HCM) are premised on the belief and evidence that human resources provide firms with a competitive edge [26]. According to Storey, Human Resource Management (HRM) is a distinctive approach to the management of employees that ‘seeks to achieve competitive advantage through the strategic deployment of a highly committed and capable workforce using an array of cultural, structural and personnel techniques’ [27]. Nancy (2004) [13] while discussing the role of HR in developing CSR culture in organizations emphasized that with the increasing significance 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. Rupp et.al (2006)[21] accentuated that CSR plays a role about nurturing constructive social relationships between organizations and communities, they highlighted that employees will turn to CSR to weigh up 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. Various studies have noted that an important mediating factor in the positive relationship between corporate social performance and corporate financial performance is the beneficial effect that corporate citizenship and community involvement practices can have on employee morale, motivation, commitment, loyalty, training, recruitment and [28] [29] [30]. Summing up the key component of the business case for corporate citizenship are the HRM benefits for companies which can be derived from many employee-based corporate citizenship or community involvement practices [31] [32]. Further good associations with employees enable a company to gain additional benefits including improving their public image, rising employee morale, and generating support from the community [33].

2) Positive relationship between HR + Employees + CSR + Competitive Advantage

Bowman and Ambrosini [34] found that employees are the intangible resources, which are important for achieving

competitive advantage because they are valuable, rare and difficult to imitate.



Source: José Milton de Sousa Filho, Lilian Soares Outtes Wanderley, Carla Pasa Gómez and Francisca Farache (2010)[35]

Figure. Sources of Competitive Advantage

Taking in view Considering the resourced-based theory of Barney,[36] and the theoretical and empirical evidence on specific business benefits by Zadek [37], the association between social strategy and competitive advantage is seen to have direct influence on their respective elements, evidenced by enhanced reputation and image, retention of excellent people, employee motivation, cumulative value and better economic performance due to the alignment of social responsibility and corporate strategy as well as innovative and efficient social projects, better environmental performance, better social performance and enhanced corporate governance. These elements being the intangible resources of an organisation they are capable of creating competitive advantage when made unusual, unique, unmatched and precious. From the formulation of social corporate strategy, the organisation can acquire competitive advantage by taking social responsibility into account.

3) Positive relationship between HR + CSR + Employee satisfaction

A survey by Sirota Survey Intelligence [38] confirmed that employees who are contented with their organization's commitment to social and environmental responsibilities are more expected to be positive, more engaged and more productive than those working for less responsible employers and it is seen that when employees are affirmative about their organizations' CSR dedication, their engagement rises to 86 per cent. On the other hand, when employees were pessimistic about their employer's CSR performance, only 37 per cent are highly engaged. Similarly, from the research of Murray [39] it was found in the survey that more than one-third of respondents mentioned that being associated with a caring and responsible employer was more significant than the salary they earned and nearly half would turn away from an employer that

was short of good corporate social responsibility policies. There is now an extensive body of research that demonstrates that corporate citizenship has constructive effects on employees' motivation and morale as well as on their commitment and loyalty to the organization [28] [29] [40]. Survey conducted across 25 countries of almost 25,000 people found that 80 per cent of people who worked for big corporate houses stated that they felt greater enthusiasm and reliability towards their jobs and companies the more socially responsible their employers became [41]. Similarly, a survey of European employees found that almost 90 per cent expressed greater dependability to employers who were socially responsible [28].

4) Positive relationship between HR + CSR + reduced Employee Attrition

Another study of employees in U.S. companies found that a company's corporate citizenship performance had an affirmative effect on the standard employees' contentment and loyalty. Particularly, the employees involved in employer-led community events were 30 per cent more likely to want to continue working for their employer and help it [28].

5) Positive relationship between HR + CSR+ Intellectual and knowledge capital

Studies have found that firms with higher reputations and extensive corporate citizenship programs seem to be **more attractive to potential applicants** [29] [42]. In the 1980s, it was noted by one proponent of corporate citizenship that few job applicants would have questioned a company's social or environmental responsibilities. But today most companies anticipate such questions, and know they need satisfactory answers if they are to recruit the best graduates [43]. A survey by Business in the Community of 1,000 employees across the UK also found that firms with socially responsible practices are **better able to attract, retain and motivate employees** [44]. Another survey of 25,000 people in 25 countries found that 70 per cent of those who worked for large companies thought their company needed to become more socially responsible [41]. Moreover CSR-oriented organizations are also more capable of attracting, retaining, and motivating their internal stakeholders – the employees - enhancing their self-concept and giving rise to greater job satisfaction, organizational commitment, efficiency as well as improving behavior towards colleagues [7] [45].

6) Positive relationship between HR + CSR+ Equity with Human Rights

Houghton, Gabel and William [46] suggest that the internal face of CSR involves not just legal compliance, but also "**ethical behavior** that goes beyond the letter of the law". The preview of activities of internal ethics management include respect for human rights, embracing diversity and providing equal employment and rewards opportunities to employees and job applicants irrespective of their demographic characteristics. More important is the building of an

organizational culture that supports ethical behavior in general that will impact both the organization and its external stakeholder community. **HR** can be the “keeper and voice” of ethics in organizations [47]. Ethics management is involved with both the ends and the means of achieving the organizational goals [48].

7) *Positive relationship between HR + Employees + CSR+ Organisational Culture*

Organizational culture is characterized by shared assumptions, beliefs and values that help to shape and guide the organizational ethical climate [49]. Therefore, organizational culture may be defined as “a set of values, beliefs and basic assumptions that are guided by leaders and shared by employees,” [50]. Thus it can be said that an organization’s culture is sculpted by internal and external challenges faced by it. These challenges in turn craft the business way of dealing with them, repeating successful methods and letting go of the unsuccessful ones. It’s the organisations way of adapting to the environmental dares. This adaptation is taught to new members, thus retaining and passing the core values as the way to do business.

Wartick & Cochran (1985), [51] in their attempt to conceptualize a model for CSR, redefined Carroll’s (1979) four dimensions of corporate social responsibilities as the “Principles of CSR.” Hence, according to these scholars, the culture of a company would form the foundation upon which it would formulate and manage its social responsibilities. Borrowing from the works of Freeman [52] and Visser [53]. The CSR dimensions and activities most relevant to the business environment in developing countries relate to workplace, environment, society and environment. Hancock [54] said that a CSR culture is fundamentally values-driven as opposed to being purely financially-driven, and invariably involves widespread and systemic change in the way that companies do business.

8) *Positive relationship between HR + CSR+ Triple Bottom Line*

Many research studies have found a positive relation between business organisations social and financial performance [55] [56]. In a Pricewaterhouse Cooper survey of global CEOs, 69% of the respondents believed that CSR was vital to company profitability [57]. Smith, 2003 stated that, CSR is not only considered the “right thing to do” amongst business, that is to contribute to the societal good, but also the “smart thing to do” as it can benefit the organization in a number of ways [58]. Orlitzky *et al* [30] also found a statistically strong correlation between a firm’s social performance and Financial Performance. Similarly McWilliams and Seigel [59] too found a positive relationship between the investments made in CSR activities and a firm’s profitability. Other research that links CSR to profitability have concluded that investments in CSR lead to yield better financial returns to organizations, both in marketing measures and in accounting measures [60]. Another

study by Tuffery 2003, on the HRM benefits of CCI noted, ‘corporate community involvement programmes can play a important role in catering to the key issues faced by human resources managers, leading to direct benefits to a company’s bottom line’ [30].

9) *Positive relationship between HR + Employees + CSR+ Employer Branding*

Greening & Turban [42] found that job applicant and employee perceptions of a firm’s CSR determines their attractiveness towards the organizations. The study by Cropanzano *et al* [61] demonstrates that the concept of organisational fairness amongst the employees heavily influences their attitudes and behaviours. Moreover Hamori’s study concluded that an organization’s reputational capital can be an pointer of its capability to attract talented employees, also reputable companies can attract investors more easily too. Further, good relationships with employees allow a company to gain additional payback which includes improved public image, increased employee morale, and support from the community [33].

A survey by Chersonson group, a New Jersey based public relations and recruitment ad agency; in 2002 found that the most vital factor 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 [62]. According to Pelozo, [63] CSR can contribute as a reputation building tool for an organization. They define a CSR–CSP relationship to show the value of CSR that provides incremental gains by increasing the organization’s goodwill and reputation to turn it into insured corporate image. Strong corporate reputations help organizations to win the war of talent and foster employee retention [64]. A corporate reputation unites all the stakeholders of the organization, as increased corporate reputation increases customer confidence in services, which effects the buying decisions. Schwaiger [65] in his research states that companies with strong reputations have better access to capital markets that lowers the capital cost. Moreover good corporate reputations serve as a guarantee for high-performing workers [66]. According to Carmelli and Tishler, [67] perceived organizational reputation is related to organizational performance, and organisations reputation serves as an immune system, leading to better organizational performance.

Confirming the increasing importance of non-monetary factors in employee motivation, one study found that a good corporate reputation was rated as the second most important characteristic when choosing a potential employer, after career growth potential and before starting [33]. Therefore, having a reputation as a good corporate citizen will provide a potentially bigger and better applicant pool from which to choose future employees from.

II. CONCLUSION

To conclude the relationship between CSR and strategic human resource management is summarised as below.



Keeping in view all the above points and discussions it would be imprudent of the organisations to use CSR activities just as a band aid to the growing pressure. The relationship between CSR and HR should be nurtured to grow a sustainable organisation.

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