Reflecting Responsible Initiatives for Successful CSR In Context of Higher Education Institutions

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ABSTRACT

Life Long learning begins at the Higher Education Institutions (HEI) and therefore HEI’s and B-Schools should take a lead in creating a platform to attend to its most important stakeholders i.e employees and students. The purpose of this paper is to reflect upon the initiatives that can be taken by B-Schools to reflect CSR in its practices towards its employees by incorporating diversity strategies in its recruitment and selection process, providing training to keep the faculties abreast with the social and environmental issues, incorporating such components in the performance and reward management to give due importance to CSR, to address to the work-life balance issues of employees. Also the paper reflects upon the initiatives that are imperative to be taken to enhance the awareness and understanding of students by re-designing the curriculum, aligning CSR with core subjects, training the students and re-designing the evaluation components.

Keywords: Higher Education Institutions, CSR, Initiatives, Stakeholders, Faculties, Students

Introduction

In the past few decades the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has gained significant attention from researchers and practitioners. There are various definitions offered to define CSR, however one of the most widely used definition has been offered by World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD, 1999). According to this definition, CSR is an organisation’s commitment to a discretionary behaviour that leads to economic development and contributes to the welfare of its employees, local community and society at large. (Kotler and Lee, 2005) also argue that CSR is an organisation’s commitment to the enhancement of the community’s well being through ethical business practices and contribution of corporate resources.

In yet another definition,(Mc-Williams et.al.2006) refer to CSR as an organisation’s disinterested and voluntary, i.e not required by law, engagement into activities leading to the attainment of some social good.

Over the past few years the concept of CSR has shown a paradigm shift from just making profits to voluntarily doing social good. The Classical view on Social Responsibility said that the only responsibility of business is to make profits. This perspective was advocated by Nobel Laureate (Friedman,1962).His argument was that the only responsibility of business organisations as economic entities was to make profits and that the organisations were only responsible to stockholders. He denied the organisations any social role. According to him production was the company’s social role and generating profits its only objective. He believed that an organisation’s only objective is to generate profits which would add on to the wealth of society. An organisation would depart from its duty if it considered other elements.

However the socio-economic view on social responsibility suggests that organisation’s social responsibility extends beyond making profits to include protection and improvement of society’s welfare. The socio-economic view is comprehensive and includes the responsibility of organisations towards owners, employees, constituents in the specific environment and society at large (Robbins & Coutler, 2005). Stakeholder theories suggest that organizations need to address issues beyond shareholder wealth (Freeman, 1984; Donaldson and Preston, 1995).

Over the years organisations have taken a significant move from discharging social obligation and being socially responsive to being socially responsible. In the wake of increasing acceptance and popularity of the concept of CSR and to assist organisations in reflecting a socially acceptable and ethical behaviour, it is essential that Higher Educational Institutions and B-Schools assume greater responsibility in making tomorrow’s professionals socially and ethically aware and sound in making decisions. Life Long learning begins at the University level and therefore higher education institutions and B-Schools should take a lead in creating a platform to attend to its most important stakeholders i.e employees and students.
Objective
The objective of the paper is to discuss and reflect upon the CSR initiatives that can be taken by Higher Education Institutions & B-Schools in attending to its most important stakeholders i.e employees and students in creating a platform for making better citizens who are aware of the social and ethical concerns and understand the implications of CSR for the betterment of society. The paper deploys an ethnographic research design and utilises the author’s own experience as a faculty. The Responsible Initiatives which can be taken by the B-Schools for attending to its most important stakeholder i.e employees is reflected in figure 1.1 below:

Figure 1.1 Responsible Initiatives for employees for better CSR.

The initiatives that can be taken by HEI’s and B-Schools for its faculty members to incorporate CSR as shown in Figure 1.1above are listed below:

Diversity in Recruitment and Selection Process:
Research has documented that employees are attracted towards organisations which have a good CSR reputation. Therefore it is significant that Higher Education Institutions reflect a reputation of being socially responsible organisations. This would attract faculties who value ethical and social values. Also Higher Education Institutions and B-Schools should include the excluded and create a platform for diverse workforce. They should give opportunities to talented faculties from all the walks of life. They should give a reflection of being an employer of choice by inviting applications from faculties from diverse background with high CSR values.

The Higher Education Institutions can also use well-validated personality tests to reveal the faculty’s characteristics and values. Employee referrals can also be used to find individuals with values compatible with that of the Institutions. Prospective employees whose CSR values are congruent with that of the University should be considered. Reflecting good CSR practices is important to attract CSR talented individuals. People aspire to work for institutions which have good employment practices. Incorporating diversity practices to recruit and select people from different walks of life belonging to different races, nation, class, and belonging to different identity groups leverages the goodwill of the organisation in being a fair employer and enhances its effectiveness by inviting varied perspectives and approaches on one hand and leveraging the self pride of employees and students in being a part of the organisation which is reflecting a status of being a fair organisation on the other hand.

People from different backgrounds and nations bring along with them their beliefs, experiences and new approaches in doing work. This also helps in attending to other stakeholder’s interest effectively as employees from different walks are better able to adhere to the requirements of customers from different walks of life. Being ethical and socially responsible also encompasses such practices by employers which emphasise equal treatment and “puts pressure on employees to make sure that important differences amongst them do not count” (Thomas & Ely, 1996). Racial and gender diversity in B-School’s higher positions also reflects its openness and inclusive attitude. Also such a diverse reflection would enable the students to value diversity at workplace and become better leaders for tomorrow.

Training and Development:
Higher Education Institutions and B-Schools should continually organise events and seminars for enhancing the awareness about social concerns amongst faculties. Socially responsible and motivated pool of faculty members can create socially responsible students who understand their role in the upliftment of society. One of the most important asset in any organisation is its employees because it is through the employees that the hearts of customers can be won. In an educational set up, the most important assets are the teachers and the students who form an essential part of any social set up. A
well trained and motivated pool of teachers can sensitize the students about social, environmental and ethical issues and guide them in the direction of social welfare. Alliance with NGO’s, inviting experts for special lectures on CSR, seminars on ethical and social issues can enhance the awareness which would enable the faculty members to better equip the students. Also they should be trained to use innovative CSR linked teaching pedagogies such as role plays, case studies, group discussions on topics that enable the students to better reflect upon the issues. There should also be provision for enhancing the employability of teachers by giving priority to life-long learning.

**Performance Appraisal and Reward Management:**
Higher Education Institutions and B-Schools can design an appropriate performance and reward system to reflect its emphasis on CSR. The values of Institutions should be reflected in the performance appraisal and reward strategies. It is essential that performance appraisal is aligned with the CSR aspects so that faculties understand the significance of values which are deemed important by the institutions. It is often quoted that what gets rewarded gets done. Therefore in order to create a socially responsible organisation, it is necessary that performance appraisal comprises of aspects comprising of the discharge of ethical and socially responsible behaviour. Initiatives taken by faculties for the good of society in general should be appreciated. Faculties should be encouraged to join NGO’s and engage in activities such as teaching unprivileged children in backward areas, participating in campaigns for environment sustainability and similar other activities. There is a need to examine the incentives and reward policies in the light of different ways in which work may be completed. A lot of difference can be made in the working style of employees by the management’s philosophy towards environment and society in general.

**Maintenance and Work Life Balance:**
With the increasing privatisation in the education sector, the dynamics of taking a career in teaching is also rapidly changing. The demands placed by the B-Schools on faculty members pose various challenges in terms of working hours, administrative tasks and involvement in organisation of various events for the industry-academia interface. All this calls for the conscious efforts by the higher education institutions to enable employees to create a harmonious balance between work and personal lives by offering a variety of benefits that employees need.

The increasing trend of women’s exit from home and entry into the workforce has certainly created problems and requires for an urgent need for good and affordable child care; troubling questions related to parenting children, stress of combining work and family needs to be resolved. Addressing the work-life balance issues of employees is a vital move and a reflection of CSR initiative by HEI’s and B-Schools towards its most important stakeholder i.e employees. The socio economic view on social responsibility also says that the responsibility of an organisation extends to its employees. A well motivated and satisfied employee would discharge the functions more ethically towards other stakeholders. It is imperative that HEI’s attend to the work-life balance of its employees. Nowadays the decision to get involved in the personal lives of employees is no longer a philosophical question but a practical one (Schwartz, 1989). B-schools should provide flexibility in schedules to the high performers.

Also besides giving maternity leaves, there should be provision for parental leave for men. Family Support should be provided in addition to maternity and parental leave for two career and single parent families during relocation. One of the most significant areas to look upon is child care which is the primary concern for any parent. In order to ensure that that working mothers function effectively without any hindrance, good and affordable child care facilities should be provided such as crèche benefits, play school for kids, medical benefits etc.

Yet another significant stakeholder is students. It is very important for Higher Education Institutions and B-Schools to instil ethical and social values in students to make them better citizens, professionals and leaders. Michael Porter has also stressed upon the “right types and quality of education of future employees” as one of the requirements for business to successfully invest in CSR and thereby enhance the competitiveness (Gardiner & Lacy, 2005). Some of the initiatives that can be taken by B-Schools for instilling socially responsible behaviour in students are shown in figure 1.2 below:
Figure 1.2: Responsible Initiatives for students for better CSR

Figure 1.2 above demonstrates the initiatives that can be taken by Higher Education Institutions and B-Schools to incorporate CSR through its practices for students which are discussed below:

**Redesigning Curriculum and adding subjects like Environmental Studies, Behavioural Science, Business Ethics and Corporate Governance:**

Endemic corruption prevalent in India calls for the necessity to produce ethically strong and socially responsible students who would become tomorrow’s leaders. There is a need to make students aware about their role in business organisations as professionals who would be responsible for the sustainable growth. It is significant to make the students aware about the links between social and corporate welfare. Better students can become better managers. In a country like ours where corruption is widespread in almost all the areas, it is significant to introduce courses on environment, ethics and CSR in making the students aware about the ethical choices they would be confronted with when they enter the corporate world in performing their roles (Srinivasan, V., 2012).

Higher Education Institutions and B-Schools can play a significant role in educating students and making them aware about the positive aspects and long term sustainable benefits of CSR. These institutions also influence the perception that students and young managers have of companies and their responsibilities towards society (Sobczak, Deucquet, & Havard, 2006). It is also believed that introduction of special courses would contribute to increasing student’s knowledge of CSR concept and tools which is already an important first step. It is suggested that such courses are embedded in the academic curriculum and should also be reflected in the culture of institutions.

It is important to understand that academic institutions send signals to students and corporate through their own behaviour about the value of responsibilities in society. Educational institutions should act as role models by explicitly extending their social responsibility towards the broader society. Addition of subjects like Environment Studies, Behavioural Science, Business Ethics and Corporate Governance as compulsory courses can be really significant in sensitising the students about various critical issues pertaining to environment and society. It has often been seen that students do not take optional courses seriously. Therefore it is significant that such courses are introduced as compulsory papers. The significance of such courses is discussed below:

**Environment Studies:**

A subject like environment studies is quite essential in all types of environmental sciences, environment engineering and industrial management. An understanding of this subject is quite significant for the students to enlighten them about the protection and conservation of environment and to refrain from activities which can have an adverse effect on environment. Equipping the students with an understanding of various types of pollution, its effects and control measures, disaster management, issues involved in enforcement of environment legislation, global warming, environmental ethics, wildlife protection, forest conservation can enable the students to assist in the move from unsustainable to sustainable development. Today’s students would become tomorrow’s managers and leaders and therefore a bigger responsibility lies on higher education institutions and B-Schools to equip the students and make them aware about the vital issues which they would be required to deal with while making business decisions in future.

**Behavioural Science:**

Behavioural Science is a very important subject which enlightens the students with strategies for development of a healthy self esteem, equips them with the significance of attitudes and its effect on personality. It also helps them in building emotional
competence which has been perceived to be significant for attaining success. The subject would also help the student in developing problem solving capabilities and creative thinking. Also the subject would help in developing empathetic attitudes in students which enables them to understand the situation from other’s perspectives. Subject like Behavioural Science can be really significant as these days organisations are also giving due importance to soft skills and behavioural dimension of employees. A behaviourally sound and empathetic individual will be better able to address the problems of customers and various other significant stakeholders.

**Business Ethics and Corporate Governance:**

A subject on Business Ethics and Corporate Governance will equip the students about ethical issues in management, relationship amongst various stakeholders, formulating and implementing socially responsive strategies and issues and approaches of measuring business social performance. It is relevant that students are given hypothetical situations comprising of ethical dilemma and their suggestions are invited to see how they present moral and ethical solutions to problems which would help them in formulating ethical policies in management positions.

Courses in environment studies, corporate governance, business ethics will enable the students to be aware of various issues faced in Indian as well as global context and make relevant decisions which would be in the social good for all. In some B schools optional courses on CSR have been introduced in business and management programs (Matten and Moon, 2004). But it has been observed that optional courses are often ignored by student which undermines the significance of such courses and therefore it is suggested that such courses are introduced as compulsory courses for all programs.

**Alignment of CSR and Business Ethics with core subjects:**

Education at Business schools has been criticized for having a curriculum which is dominated by socially irresponsible and ethically dubious assumptions of certain core theories and concepts in the shareholder-value-oriented perspective that discourages CSR awareness and behaviour (Matten and Moon, 2004). Such criticisms call for a need to make the students aware of the significance and implications of CSR. Alignment of CSR concepts and business ethics with core subjects can go a long way in instilling ethical values in students. Higher Education Institutions and B-Schools should take initiatives to design the curriculum in a way that core subjects are aligned with CSR concepts and issues. For instance a course in advertising should also talk of ethics in advertising; subjects in strategic management should also give scope for understanding the subject from CSR perspective to enable students who would be future managers to frame corporate level, business level and functional level strategies keeping the social, environmental and ethical issues into consideration.

Similarly subject on Human Resource Management should also comprise of modules talking of CSR in HR related issues. The various functions of HRM namely procurement, training and development, compensation, maintenance should be taught aligning them with CSR practices. The same should apply to subjects like accountancy, business environment, financial management, financial markets, legal aspects of business etc.

**Training and Development for Students:**

Seminars, Group Discussions, Events, Panel Discussions pertaining to CSR should be organised and students should be made aware about the environmental issues and trained to preserve the rare resources. They should be aware about the issues such as urban problems related to energy, resettlement and rehabilitation of people, environmental ethics, global warming wildlife protection and other similar issues. Awareness about such social and environmental issues is quite significant as awareness is instrumental in taking necessary steps for resolving such issues. Promotion of special programs on CSR to educate students can also help in instilling good values in them. Students should be encouraged to participate in environmental clubs and committees. Inter college competitions on CSR concepts should be organised. Students should be trained through role plays, workshops, case-studies to enhance their understanding of such vital issues.

**Re-designing the Evaluation Component:**

In the wake of increasing competition and internationalisation, the focus has shifted from efforts to results. There is a need to re-design the assessment system and to make students realise the significance of their contribution towards the society as responsible citizens. A component of assessment should also comprise of assessing the moral behaviour, social and environmental awareness and the practices followed by them in their day to day
operations to safeguard the valuable and rare resources that one has for sustainable development.

Encouraging students and rewarding them to take up research projects on social and environmental issues which are beneficial to the society and offering solutions can be significant. Little efforts in the day to day operations can make this place a better world to live in for the present as well as future generations. It is often quoted, what gets rewarded gets done. The question is what are we instilling in our most important assets i.e. students. Are we making them just academically sound by focusing on CGPA and Percentages or do we also want to instil in them ethical, moral and social values to make them better human beings who can drive organisations and the nation in a responsible way.

A lot depends on the philosophy, values and beliefs instilled in the students by their teachers, parents, environment that they live in. It is very important to give a deep thought on these issues and redesign the evaluation components to make them understand the relevance of issues which really require a thought beyond CGPA’s and percentages.

Conclusion
Life Long learning begins at the University level and therefore higher education institutions and B-Schools should take a lead in creating a platform to attend to its most important stakeholders i.e. employees and students. They have a bigger responsibility to reflect CSR in their practices when it comes to recruitment and selection practices, attending to the work-life balance issues of its employees, organising training programs for them and inculcating ethical values amongst students and making them aware about the benefits and impact of CSR on the economical and social landscape. The paper proposes various initiatives that can be taken by Higher Education Institutions and B-Schools to reflect CSR in its recruitment and selection practices by incorporating diversity strategies, providing training and life-long learning to bridge the skill gap to enhance employability and to keep the faculties abreast with the social and environmental issues, incorporating such components in the performance and reward management to give due importance to CSR, to understand the work-life balance issues of employees in the wake of increasing competition and stress and to offer a range of benefits to help employees balance their personal and professional lives.

Also the paper reflects upon the initiatives that are imperative to be taken to enhance the awareness and understanding of students by re-designing the curriculum, training the students, re-designing the evaluation components. Significant signals should be given by Higher Education Institutes and B-Schools to make the employees and students understand the value of CSR. Its mission, vision and values should be clearly aligned with CSR to make its human capital realise the value that it attaches with social good. Organising seminars, encouraging green initiatives, pictorial symbols in the campus, talks and discussions on social and environmental issues can go a long way in instilling CSR awareness amongst its people. This would also encourage the practices which are in alignment with the environmental and social benefit.

Suggestions for Future Research
The need to have leaders who can make wise decisions than just focus on bottom line results have never been so acute. Also critics are not completely wrong in saying that B Schools are not encouraging social responsibility in business education. Faculty also needs to demonstrate high ethical practices in the manner in which they deal with the students. Faculty will be required to play the role of a facilitator who can bring out sensitive issues both at the national and global level in a way that students can appreciate and reflect upon.

Some Higher Education Institutions and B-Schools are making conscious efforts to reflect a good image by engaging in CSR activities and also by making the employees and students aware about the significant social and environmental issues. However still there seems to be a gap in how education is imparted to students and what values are imparted along with the teaching of academic curriculum. Further research can be done to empirically explore the initiatives taken by B-Schools in this direction. Linkage between the CSR initiatives and the awareness of students regarding CSR issues can be empirically explored. Also culture of B-Schools play an important role in the CSR awareness and practices followed by students. Efforts can be made to explore the linkage between the two empirically.

References


