

## Corporate social responsibility at your workplace

### It's hot!

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a hot issue in today's corporate strategy and can be started at your workplace. Before we can be responsible to the society at large, we should show responsibility to our people by taking good care of them before extending our responsibility outside the workplace. It is the job of the human resources (HR) manager or employer to treat employees in such a way that they look forward to coming to work every day and are proud to tell others where they work. Remember that employees are the best public relations officers of the company.

### What exactly is Corporate Social Responsibility?

The term "Corporate Social Responsibility" has been defined differently by different groups of people. Some consider CSR to be corporate public relations but CSR has a deeper, meaningful definition. It is generally defined as operating a business that meets or exceeds the ethical, legal, commercial and public expectations that society has of business. An HR manager who deploys CSR at the workplace should have a broad view of human welfare, and a long term perspective about the consequences of today's activities. If the goal of business is to deliver a sustainable long-term value, human capital plays a significant role in strategically implementing sound HR management practices that support the company's business goals

### Extending strategic Corporate Social Responsibility to the most valuable assets

As a HR manager, you can start practicing and using CSR as a key tool in **strategically** managing and leveraging the company's most valuable assets – its employees. By doing this, the HR manager offers a sense of belonging in the organisation and at the same time inspires feelings of loyalty, encourages job satisfaction and success amongst staff.

Take Shell in Nigeria as an example. When it first came to Nigeria in late 1950s, the country had very few personnel with specialised skills in the aspects of oil and gas exploration and development. All skilled production employers were expatriates whose maintenance cost was very high. To address this issue, the company introduced a programme of scholarships for secondary schools as well as for local and overseas universities and technical colleges. By 1970, the Nigerian employees outnumbered the expatriates in the support service category. Currently, over 100 Nigerian employees are assigned to Shell operations outside the country as a result of the programme which is complemented by continuous training. The investment in technical training proved beneficial for the company, the individuals involved, and from a bigger perspective, for developing countries in general. This resulted in a better society at large, paid off by the investment in human capital development.

### Practices and policies have to be in sync

To ensure that employees have the capabilities that will help their company to gain competitive advantage in the present and in the future, the HR manager has to ensure organisational practices and policies are in sync with the external demands of the market. So, the HR manager has to understand business, market and economic trends, and proactively plan programmes to assist employees to develop to their full potential, enhancing both the individual's strengths and the organisation's competitiveness. This entails sustainable development for long term business growth and helps solve the problems of talent attraction and retention. The escalating talent war can be overcome if HR managers and employers take a hands-on approach and adopt strategic moves to keep ahead of their competitors.

### ISO 26000

In the next two years, the International Organization for Standardization will launch the development of an International Standard, ISO26000. It will provide guidelines for social responsibility but will not be used as a certification standard as its use will be voluntary. It aims to encourage voluntary commitment to social responsibility and will lead to common guidance on concepts, definitions and methods of evaluation.

The need for organisations in both public and private sectors to behave in a socially responsible way is becoming a general requirement of society. Until then, human resources managers and employers should proactively initiate corporate social responsibility at their workplace to reduce or eliminate in-house problems before extending practices and policies outside their own communities.

More information on ISO 26000 can be found at [www.iso.org/iso/socialresponsibility\\_2006](http://www.iso.org/iso/socialresponsibility_2006)

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