

EXPECTATIONS OF RESPONSIBLE HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT IN THREE INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXTS – A SURVEY STUDY IN SPAIN

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Abstract

While implications of corporate social responsibility for marketing in private firms have been deeply investigated, fewer efforts have been devoted to clarify citizens' perceptions of responsibility within public settings, including public administrations and universities. At the same time, while most previous research on socially responsible consumer behavior has been mainly centered on societal and ecological concerns, less is known about the responsibilities attributed by citizens to organizations in the relationship with other stakeholders, especially the internal staff. To fill these gaps in previous literature, this paper is aimed to analyze citizens' expectations of responsible human resources management (HRM) as internal expression of corporate social responsibility in three types of organizations, namely, private firms, public administrations and universities.

According to this purpose, three survey studies were conducted in Spain. Participants on the two first surveys were general citizens, as main interlocutors of private firms and public administrations. In the third survey, we collected data from a sample of university students, as main stakeholders of higher education institutions. Findings confirm that, with independence of the institutional setting, citizens' awareness of the importance of responsible HRM is especially marked regarding the practices of risk prevention and promotion of health and safety at work, professional development and lifelong learning, and respect for diversity and equal opportunities. Further, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) carried out to test the effect of the institutional context on the social perception of responsible HRM shows remarkable differences between the practices expected by citizens within private firms, public administrations and universities. Implications of the study and suggestions for further research are discussed.

Key words: human resources management (HRM), corporate social responsibility (CSR), private firms, public administrations, universities, social perception, citizens' expectations.

Classification JEL: M12 – Personnel Management; M14 – Social Responsibility.

1. Introduction

In current marketplaces, human potential management is not only a way to improve workforce performance, but a new demand to be fulfilled by organizations in order to respond to citizens' expectations and maintain their reputation. From this viewpoint, it is assumed that citizens' demands and expectations have to be satisfied beyond the specific need which originated the relationship with the organization. In words of *Baker (2006, pp. 197-198)*, "distinction between success and failure in competitive markets may be reduced to two basic issues, first, an understanding of marketing needs, and, second, the ability to deliver added value".

In this sense, organizations are more and more convinced that improvement of social settings through their own activity has a great potential to contribute to financial goals. Particularly, issues such as collaboration with social causes, guarantee of fair relationships with stakeholders, fair trade, respect for the environment and responsible human management are, among others, new strategies used by all kind of organizations to influence their objective publics and differentiate product offerings (*Becker-Olsen et al., 2006*).

In Europe, governmental awareness of the importance of this topic began to be explicit in the Lisbon European Council, celebrated in 2000. It made a special appeal to companies' sense of social responsibility regarding best practices for lifelong learning, work organisation,

equal opportunities, social inclusion and sustainable development (*European Commission, 2000*). Afterwards, the *Green Paper* for promoting a European Framework for corporate social responsibility described it as “a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis,” (*European Commission, 2001, p. 6*). The document identified two distinct dimensions, internal and external, of corporate social responsibility. From this view, within the company, socially responsible practices primarily involve employees and relate to issues such as investing in human capital, health and safety, and managing change, while environmentally responsible practices relate mainly to the management of natural resources used in the production. On the other hand, responsibility extends beyond the doors of the company into the local community and involves a wide range of stakeholders, including business partners and suppliers, customers, public authorities, and NGOs representing local communities, as well as the environment.

According to this specification, many authors have investigated the implications of corporate social responsibility for marketing in private companies, concluding that contribution to social and environmental causes may induce consumer goodwill towards the company (e.g., *Brown and Dacin, 1997; Jones, 1997; Handelman and Arnold, 1999; Lorge, 1999; Maignan, 2001*), and thus remarking the importance of considering the way that corporate decisions are perceived by the public. However, although it can be intuitively expected that other kind of public organizations meet such a kind of social obligations as well, fewer efforts have been devoted to clarify the perceptions of citizens on the matter, even when understanding of citizen's expectations and experiences has a great potential to improve the quality of service in public institutions.

At the same time, while most previous attempts devoted to develop scales for measuring socially responsible consumer behaviour have focused almost exclusively on societal and ecological concerns (*Roberts, 1993, 1995, 1996; Mohr et al., 2001; Webb et al., 2008*), less is known about the responsibilities attributed by citizens to organizations in the relationship with other stakeholders, including employees, business partners and competitors, such dimensions being currently at the heart of host of requirements and public standards in different countries around the globe.

This paper tries to fill these gaps in previous literature by studying citizens' expectations of responsible human resources management (HRM) as internal expression of corporate social responsibility in three types of organizations, namely, private firms, public administrations and universities. Particularly, we are intended to analyse citizens' expectations of responsible HRM as part of organizations' habitual functioning in these three different institutional contexts.

According to this focus, the paper is organized as follows. Next section reviews previous literature on perceptions and expectations of corporate social responsibility and responsible HRM in private firms, public administrations, and universities. Then, three survey studies devoted to analyse citizens' expectations regarding responsible HRM in these institutional settings are presented. Finally finding of the studies and their implications are discussed.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Expectations of responsibility in private firms

Most previous scientific works analysing citizen perceptions of responsibility in private firms have focused on the implications of corporate social responsibility for consumer behaviour. In general, major evidences reveal that socially responsible initiatives may induce consumer goodwill towards the organization, whereas irresponsible companies would be

punished (*Brown and Dacin, 1997; Jones, 1997; Handelman and Arnold, 1999; Lorge, 1999; Maignan, 2001; Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Singh et al., 2008; Marín and Ruíz, 2007; Marín et al., 2009*).

Nevertheless, some other results point that the effects of corporate social reputation on consumer behaviour remain inconclusive or, at least, more complex than expected. In this respect, some studies report explicit declarations by consumers that responsibility is not a factor in their purchasing decisions (*Brown and Dacin, 1997; Carrigan and Attalla, 2001; Castaldo and Perrini, 2004*). Instead, tangible aspects such as price, innovation, guarantees and other information about the product are known to affect buying decisions directly (*Fombrun, 1996; Maignan and Ferrell, 2001; Page and Fearn, 2005; Castaldo et al., 2009*), whereas ethical and social concerns seem to be relatively unnoticed and of secondary importance for most consumers (*Castaldo and Perrini, 2004; Singh et al., 2008*).

In the context of such controversy, experts call for further investigation about the consequences of social responsibility for consumer behaviour (*Marín and Ruíz, 2007*). Some prescriptions for research in this line include the convenience of characterizing the corporate behaviors that are perceived as significant of social responsibility by citizens (*Maignan, 2001*). From this view, some previous studies carried out in Spain have tried to analyze citizens' perceptions of firms' responsibilities towards all their stakeholders at both internal and external levels (*Vázquez et al., 2011a, 2011b, 2012a*). Main conclusions of this works suggest that the most salient practices for citizens refer to the work conditions of employees at the internal level, and relationships with consumers, respect for the environment and contribution to social causes at the external level. Remaining practices concerning responsible transactions with other groups of stakeholders (i.e., business partners, suppliers and distributors, and competitors) are perceived important but less central in the set of social functions attributed to private firms (*Vázquez et al., 2011a, 2011b*). Further, the same line of research probes, that citizens base their behaviour as consumers in the same kind of responsible practices (*Vázquez et al., 2012a*).

Taken together, these previous results point to the conclusion that responsible HRM is a visible aspect for citizens and has a positive impact on the way they approach private firms. However, less is known about the internal responsibilities attributed by citizens in other institutional contexts, particularly within the public sector. In this sense, next sections review the concept of corporate social responsibility applied to public administrations and universities and summarize previous literature on social perception on the matter, particularly focusing on the internal dimension of responsible HRM.

2.2. Expectations of responsibility in public administrations

Beyond private firms, nowadays social responsibility is more and more a matter of all kind of organizations. In this area, the *Agenda 21* (*United Nations, 1992*) is a comprehensive action plan to be taken globally, nationally and locally by organizations of the United Nations System, governments and major groups in every area in which humans impact on the environment. This plan is aimed to convert the current model of development into a new model of sustainable development by means of the involvement and cooperation between public administrations.

When analysing the functions of public administrations regarding social responsibility, two perspectives can be assumed. By one hand, as public agent, the Public Administration must take some part in the regulation of corporate social responsibility in private firms. Complementary, as public institutions, the incorporation of responsible practices in the interaction between public administrations and its internal and external stakeholders must be considered.

In this second respect, as economic and social actors, public administrations must be models of responsible behaviour in its own internal and external activities. In this vein, European public administrations are integrating more and more the responsibility principles in their own management systems and relationships with their stakeholders (*Melle, 2007*). According to this trend, The *King Committee on Corporate Governance (2002)* set six basic principles for social responsibility within these public contexts, namely: 1) incorporation of social responsibility in management politics, remuneration criteria and systems or procedures; 2) objective identification of interested parties, including differentiation between primary and complementary stakeholders; 3) participative organization, leadership and management; 4) transparency and statement of accounts; 5) ethical commitment, respect for diversity and equal opportunities; and 6) adoption of formal social responsibility codes.

However, when compared to corporate social responsibility in private firms, fewer efforts have been devoted to clarify the social perception of responsibility within public administrations, even when understanding of citizen's expectations and experiences have a great potential to improve the quality of public services. In Spain, a recent research by *Vázquez et al. (2012b)* was intended to analyse the responsibility functions attributed by citizens' to public administrations in their habitual activity, just as their experiences of satisfaction on the matter. As main conclusion, participants in the study were found to show a slightly higher awareness of the convenience of reinforcing the involvement of Spanish public administrations in internal responsible practices when compared to external considerations. In this respect, citizens demanded a greater involvement in practices such as transparency in financial management and efficiency in the assignation of public resources, together with the maintenance of responsible HRM in the recruitment and treatment of administrative staff and public authorities.

In the context of these previous findings, this paper is intended to compare citizens' expectations of responsible HRM within public administrations to the social perception predominant in private firms and other public settings, such as the universities.

2.2. Expectations of responsibility in universities

Obviously, universities cannot stay out of line with the current thinking on social responsibility and sustainable development. These institutions are not only organizations, but also a key figure in the education of people as citizens, professionals and executives (*Vallaes, 2008; Ceulemans and De Prins, 2009*). That is the reason why more and more universities are trying to foster and implement a concept of university social responsibility in their daily functioning.

In order to understand this new model of university management, it is interesting to take into account the *European Commission's* view (*2011*). According to it, universities have to take responsibility for the effects and consequences caused by their strategies, structures, policies and performances, just like any other organization (*Argandoña, 2012*). From this point of view, university social responsibility is "an implicit commitment in universities' raison of spreading and implementing both general and particular principles and values through their ordinary performances, such as management, education, research and external projection, and this way satisfying responsibilities taken on society" (*González and Martos, 2010*).

Within this focus, most previous research on university social responsibility has been developed in Latin American universities. Most models developed in these settings are impact-based, that is, they assume a business perspective and bound social responsibility to the way organizations manage their impacts on people, society, economy and the environment (*Vallaes, 2009*). Particularly, it is understood that universities cause four different types of

impacts around them, namely, educational, cognitive, organizational and social. Within this view, it is assumed that both educational and cognitive impacts are caused by universities themselves as organizations, whereas social and organizational impacts can be caused by both universities and private companies.

Among the four impacts of universities on the society, the organizational impact incorporates both labour and environmental aspects and aims to build a responsible campus supported by democracy and sustainability. According to *Vallaes (2008)*, universities should serve as an example of democratic institutions and as a model of sustainable development by means of responsible policies and strategies, openness, transparency and equity in a fair and objective way.

Within impact-based theoretical models, most previous empirical studies have focused almost exclusively on the educational side of university social responsibility, thus describing experiences of inclusion of responsibility contents within business syllabuses (*Mahoney, 1990; McKenna, 1995; Christensen et al., 2007; Fernández and Bajo-Sanjuán, 2010; Wu et al., 2010; Setó-Pamies, 2011*), evaluating the success of specific initiatives (*McDonald, 2004; Tyler and Tyler, 2006; Balotsky and Steingard, 2006; Caldwell, 2009; Hartman and Werhane, 2009*), and analyzing the impact of education on the responsibility awareness of students (*Sobczak et al., 2006; Kolodinsky, 2010; Moon and Orlitzky, 2011*).

Beyond that, a recent research by *Vázquez et al. (2013)* proved the coexistence of seven different factors when defining the social perception of university social responsibility held by students as main stakeholders of these institutions. Particularly, the dimensions identified were: external projection, research, education in environmental values, internal management, university-firm relationships, and education in social values. When asked about their experiences of satisfaction with these aspects, the internal management dimension concerning mainly staff's working conditions, obtained the highest scores, thus supporting positive expectations on the matter.

According to previous results, this paper is intended to compare the citizens' expectations of responsible HRM within private firms, public administrations and universities, in order to identify differences in the social perception of the internal dimension of corporate social responsibility in different institutional settings. In doing that, next section describes the results of three survey studies carried out with three independent samples in Spain.

3. Methodology

3.1. Sampling and procedure

According to the purposes of the research, we conducted three different survey studies in Spain in order to analyse citizens' expectations of responsible HRM within private firms, public administrations, and a public university. Participants in the two first surveys were general citizens, as main interlocutors of private firms and public administrations. In the third survey, we collected data from a sample of university students, as main stakeholders of higher education institutions.

To investigate citizens' expectations of responsible HRM within private companies, the sample of the first survey comprised 400 citizens from the Spanish region of León, ensuring a size for a representative 95% (being $e = \pm 5\%$; $p = q = 0.50$). Respondents were randomly selected from general population according to real distributions by gender and age. Based on these criteria, the total sample comprised 220 females (55%) and 180 males (45%), aged 18 to 75 years old ($M = 44.39$, $SD = 15.87$).

In comparable terms, the sample of the second survey, concerning citizens' expectations of responsible HRM within public administrations, was composed of 400 citizens from the same region. From the total of participants, 222 were females (55.5%) and 178 were males (44.5%) aged 18 to 75 years old ($M = 41.77$, $SD = 14.47$).

As for the survey on expectations of responsible HRM within the university, we focused our study in a representative sample of 400 students of the University of León. Participants in the survey were selected by using a procedure of stratified sampling by field of studies. According to that, 44% of respondents indicated a main academic background on Social and Legal disciplines, 6.5% on Arts and Humanities, 25% on Technical and Engineering, 15.8% on Health, and 8.8% on Experimental Sciences. By gender, the sample comprised 159 males (39.8%) and 241 females (60.3%), aged 19 to 32 years old ($M = 22.63$, $SD = 2.01$).

Participants in the three surveys were presented the same list of indicators defining responsible HRM practices, namely:

- Risk prevention and promotion of health and safety at work.
- Professional development and lifelong learning.
- Respect for diversity and equal opportunities.
- Work and life balance.
- Participative management.

Participants in each study were asked to rate their expectations of involvement of private firms, public administrations, and the university –respectively– in every practice, by using a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (“not involved at all”) to 5 (“completely involved”).

3.2. Results

Figure 1 displays the response percentages and mean scores obtained for participants in the first survey when asked about their expectations of involvement of private firms in responsible HRM practices. In general terms, average scores were above 4 in the five-point response scale, thus pointing to high expectations between participants. Particularly, higher mean scores corresponded to risk prevention and promotion of health and safety at work ($M = 4.56$), respect for the diversity and equal opportunities ($M = 4.39$), and professional development and lifelong learning ($M = 4.29$). Average punctuations were obtained for work and life balance ($M = 4.17$) and participative management ($M = 4.06$).

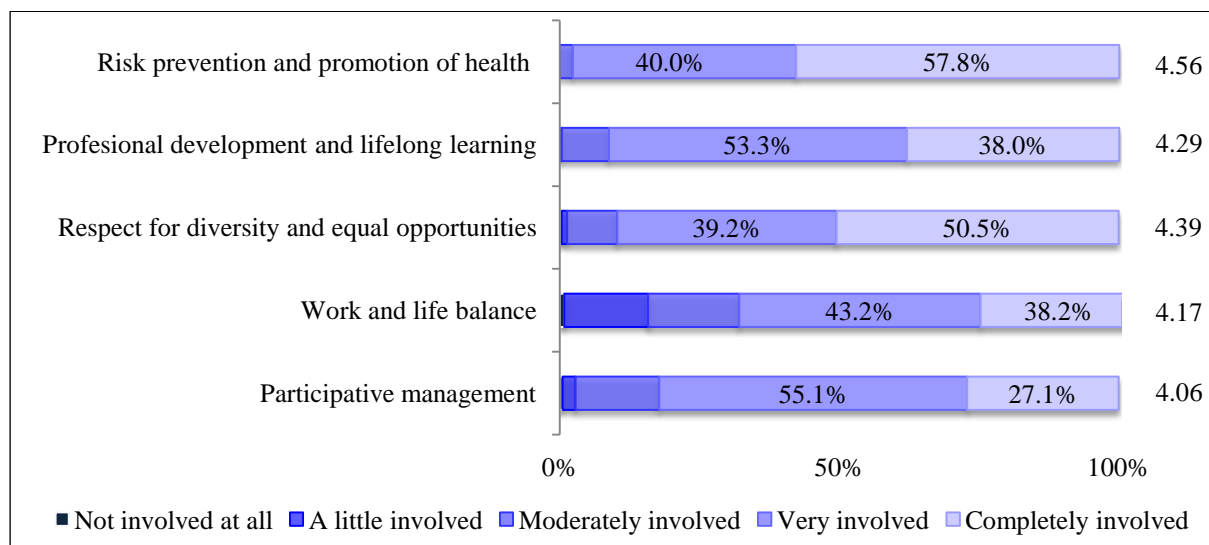


Figure 1: Expectations of responsible HRM in private firms (source: own study)

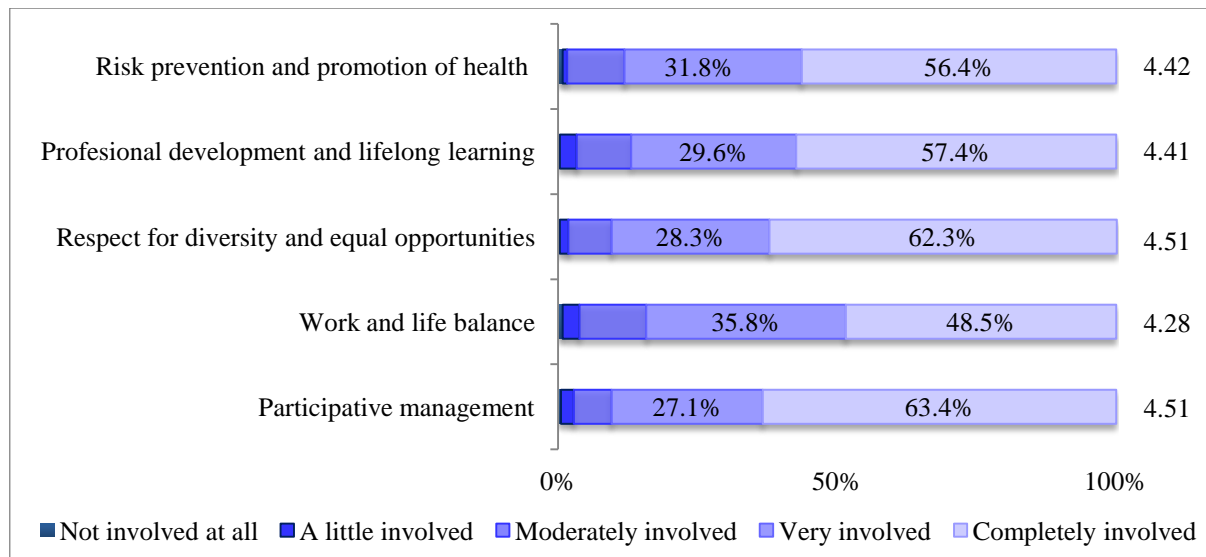


Figure 2: Expectations of responsible HRM in public administrations (source: own study)

As for the second survey on citizens' expectations of public administrations' involvement in responsible HRM, average scores were again considerably high (Figure 2), especially regarding respect for the diversity and equal opportunities ($M = 4.51$), participative management ($M = 4.51$), risk prevention and promotion of health and safety at work ($M = 4.42$), and professional development and lifelong learning ($M = 4.41$). The lowest mean value corresponded in this case to work and life balance ($M = 4.28$).

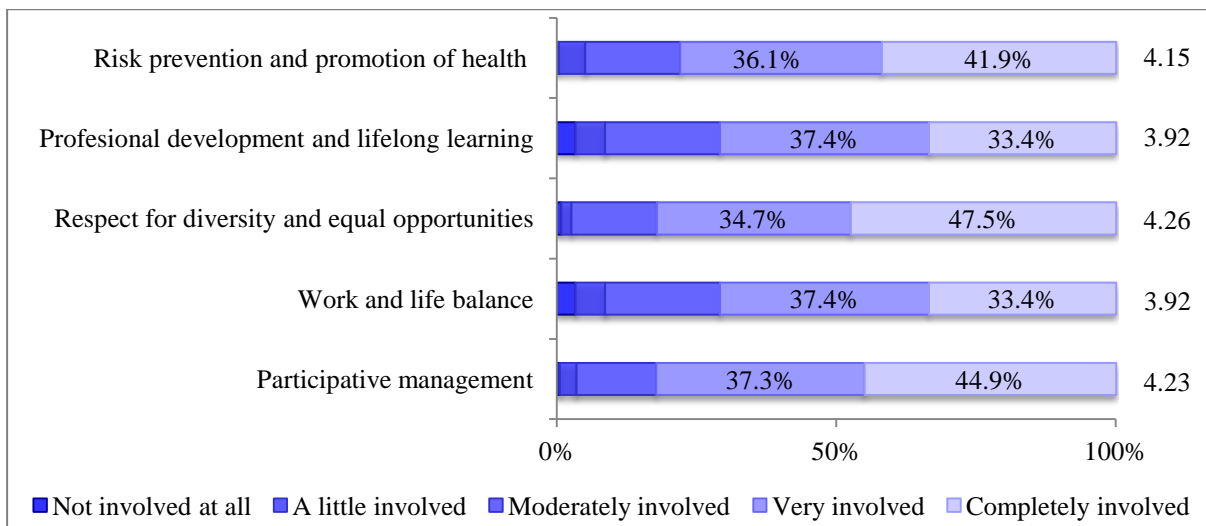


Figure 3: Expectations of responsible HRM in the university (source: own study)

And regarding expectations of responsible HRM within the university, Figure 3 displays the results obtained for participants in the third survey. Highest average scores were obtained in respect for the diversity and equal opportunities ($M = 4.26$), participative management ($M = 4.23$), and risk prevention and promotion of health and safety at work ($M = 4.15$), while lower mean values corresponded to professional development and lifelong learning ($M = 3.92$) and work and life balance ($M = 3.92$).

Based on preliminary descriptive results, we performed a one-way between-groups multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) to investigate the effect of the institutional context (private firms, public administrations and public university) as independent variable on the five indicators of responsible HRM considered as dependent variables. Results of MANOVA are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1: Results of MANOVA (source: own study)

Variable	Wilks' Lambda	F	η^2	F	η^2
Risk prevention and promotion of health	0.857	19.03***	0.074	31.82***	0.051
Professional development and lifelong learning				36.43***	0.058
Respect for diversity and equal opportunities				10.13***	0.017
Work and life balance				17.02***	0.028
Participative management				34.46***	0.055

Note: *** $p < 0.001$ (Bonferroni adjusted level: $p < 0.01$)

Taken together, it was confirmed a statistically significant difference between the three groups of participants surveyed about on the combined dependent variables: $F(10, 2366) = 19.03$, $p < 0.001$; Wilks' Lambda = 0.857; $\eta^2 = 0.074$. Likewise, when results for the dependent variables were considered separately, all differences reached statistical significance using a Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of 0.01.

Table 2: HSD post hoc analysis (source: own study)

Variable	Organization (I)	Organization (J)	(I – J)	Std. Error
Risk prevention and promotion of health	Private firms	Public admin.	0.13*	0.053
	Private firms	University	0.41***	0.053
	Public admin.	University	0.28***	0.053
Professional development and lifelong learning	Private firms	University	0.36***	0.059
	Public admin.	University	0.49***	0.059
Respect for diversity and equal opportunities	Public admin.	University	0.24***	0.054
Work and life balance	Private firms	University	0.24***	0.064
	Public admin.	University	0.36***	0.064
Participative management	Public admin.	Private firms	0.46***	0.056
	Public admin.	University	0.28***	0.056
	University	Private firms	0.17**	0.056

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.005$; *** $p < 0.001$

Table 2 displays the results of the HSD Tukey post hoc tests performed to analyse differences between institutional contexts more in deep. In short, differences between expectations of responsible HRM in private firms and public administrations were statistically significant regarding two items. In this vein, involvement in practices for risk prevention and promotion of health and safety at work were highly expected in private contexts ($M = 4.56 > M = 4.42$) whereas expectations of participative management were higher in public settings ($M = 4.51 > M = 4.06$). Even when differences did not reach statistical significance, it is also worth mentioning the slightly higher mean scores obtained for

expectations within public administrations when compared to private firms with regards to the remaining practices of professional development and lifelong learning ($M = 4.41 > M = 4.29$), respect for diversity and equal opportunities ($M = 4.51 > M = 4.39$), and work and life balance ($M = 4.28 > M = 4.17$).

As for comparison to university settings, average scores obtained in the sample of undergraduates were these ones are considerable lower than those obtained in the other surveys. Particularly, participants expected a higher involvement of private firms than the university analysed in internal responsibility practices such as risk prevention and promotion of health ($M = 4.56 > M = 4.15$), professional development and lifelong learning ($M = 4.29 > M = 3.92$), and work and life balance ($M = 4.17 > M = 3.92$). Opposite, expectations of participative management were higher in the university than in private firms ($M = 4.23 > M = 4.06$).

Finally, expectations within public administrations were higher than in universities for all the indicators included in the surveys: risk prevention and promotion of health ($M = 4.42 > M = 4.15$), professional development and lifelong learning ($M = 4.41 > M = 3.92$), respect for diversity and equal opportunities ($M = 4.51 > M = 4.26$), work and life balance ($M = 4.28 > M = 3.92$), and participative management ($M = 4.51 > M = 4.23$).

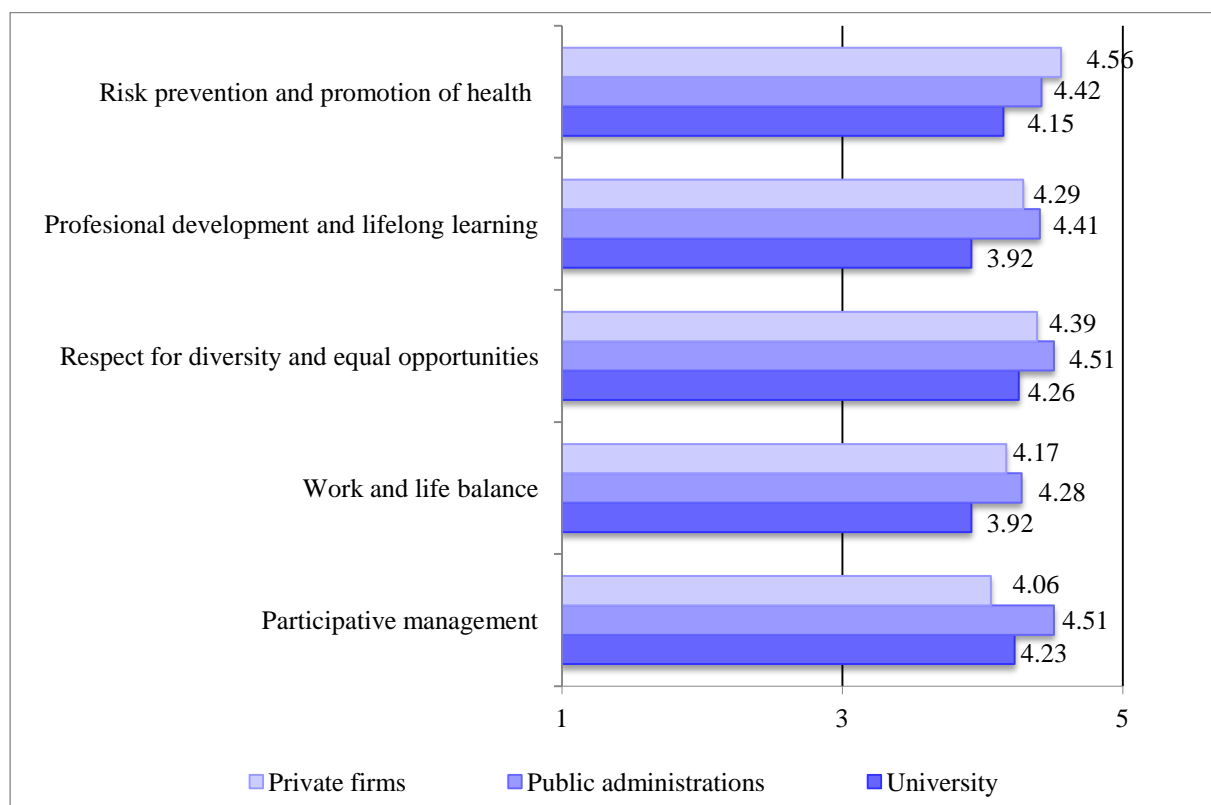


Figure 4: Comparative results between surveys (source: own study)

4. Conclusion

While implications of corporate social responsibility for marketing in private firms have been deeply investigated, fewer efforts have been devoted to clarify citizens' perceptions of responsibility within public settings, including public administrations and universities. At the same time, while most previous research on socially responsible consumer behaviour has

been mainly centred on societal and ecological concerns, less is known about the responsibilities attributed by citizens to organizations in the relationship with other stakeholders, especially the internal staff.

To fill these gaps in previous literature, this paper has been aimed to describe citizens' expectations of responsible HRM as internal expression of corporate social responsibility in three types of organizations, namely, private firms, public administrations and universities. Further, it has been our purpose to investigate the impact of the institutional setting on the social perception of HRM responsibilities.

According to results of three different surveys, our findings confirm that, with independence of the institutional setting, citizens' awareness of the importance of responsible HRM is especially marked regarding the practices of risk prevention and promotion of health and safety at work, professional development and lifelong learning, and respect for diversity and equal opportunities. Even if high, expectations seem to be lower for other kind of practices such as work and life balance and participative management.

Considering the type of organization surveyed, results point that some relevant differences may exist. For instance, expectations of responsible HRM are higher in private firms than in public administrations only in the area of risk prevention and promotion of health, whereas participative management is considered a key point within both public administrations and universities when compared to private companies.

In the same respect, as an important conclusion of this study, results showed that expectations of responsible HRM in the university were lower than those attributed by citizens' to both private firms and public administrations for most indicators analysed. While some effect of the institutional context can be identified in this pattern of results, it is also worth mentioning that one limitation of the research conducted relates to the comparability of the samples used in the three surveys.

In this vein, while the samples used to study expectations of responsible HRM within private firms and public administrations were both extracted from the general population of citizens in a specific Spanish region, the third survey was conducted with a sample of university students. Even if this sample is considered useful to analyse the social perception characteristic of the most immediate group of stakeholders of university institutions, participants in the study had specific traits in terms of age and life styles which make them a less comparable sample. For that reason, future attempts should be devoted to overcome this weakness. In the meanwhile, from the results obtained here, we can say that the expectations of the objective publics of different types of institutions with regards to their involvement in responsible HRM differ, thus supporting important implications for the design and communication of corporate social responsibility plans in different organizational settings.

In line with the previous, further research should be aimed to replicate the results of the surveys described here in other regional contexts and countries, in order to test the generalising of the results described here. Complementary to this, it would be also pertinent to analyse the role of other cultural and politic factors in the relationship between institutional context and social perception of responsible HRM and corporate social responsibility in general. Finally, future studies should extend the spectrum of institutional settings considered here to other types of organizations, at both public and private levels, in an attempt to build a more complete vision of the topic and its practical implications in different contexts.

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