

RESPONSIBLE HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT IN THE UNIVERSITY – A VIEW OF SPANISH STUDENTS

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Abstract

This paper reviews previous literature on University Social Responsibility (USR) and the impacts-based model and uses it to analyze the view of students regarding human resources management (HRM) as internal impact of social responsibility in the university. In doing that, a self-reporting study with a sample of 400 Spanish undergraduates at the University of León was conducted. Descriptive analysis revealed that awareness of the importance of responsible human management in the university is notably widespread among students, whereas some significant gaps exist between perceived and desired importance awarded to issues like professional development and continuing education for faculty and staff, economic management transparency and procurement of supplies and services under responsible and sustainable criteria.

It means, three main conclusions of this paper can be stressed: 1. Awareness of the importance of responsible human management in organizations is notably widespread among students, thus reaffirming the idea that socially responsible internal activities contribute to universities' ability to satisfy for their students, improve their prestige and attract new students. 2. Items most demanded by students are: economic management transparency, procurement of supplies and services under responsible and sustainable criteria and professional development and continuing education for faculty and staff because a good professors, sustainable supplies and understanding of the entire university internal management generate trust and better quality in the organization. 3. There exist some gaps between perceived and desired importance awarded to HRM practices in University. Thus, universities should do an effort to be transparent and inform all their stakeholders on their internal management with the aim to get their loyalty and trust. Implications of these results are discussed.

Key words: universities, human resources management (HRM), student perception, university social responsibility (USR), Spain.

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

1. Introduction

Nowadays, universities have a crucial role to play in optimizing the way society is managed, in attaining the objective of ensuring major improvements in people's lives. In addition, universities are not only educational services providers (*Sullivan, 2003*) but also produce good citizens who are trained for both competency and character (*Ehrlich, 2000; Wilhite & Silver, 2005*). This way, university will be seen as an institution of quality, trust and will cause loyalty among its students. The implementation of measures for university social responsibility (USR) depicts an improvement in the management of the institutions themselves (*Casani & Pérez, 2009*) and serves as a competitive advantage.

Currently, European universities are experiencing a process of change which offers the perfect opportunity to implement a socially responsible management in this context, since a new common spectrum of degrees, diplomas and curriculums is being established in the context of the European Higher Education Area (*López Álvarez, 2010*). Thus, social responsibility activities have turn into habitual within the strategic plans of universities, which are more and more concerned for achieving and maintaining their reputation and making it clear their necessity to satisfy demands and expectations of stakeholders. These are the reasons why more and more institutions of higher education are trying to foster and implement university social responsibility (USR) strategies in all university areas.

From this view, students' perceptions and experiences with regards to USR represent a valuable input for universities, in order to develop sustainability and responsibility marketing strategies adapted to the specific needs and priorities of their objective publics and build the basis of development and social welfare (*Vázquez et al., in press*). Particularly, it is understood that universities cause four different types of impacts around them: educational, cognitive, organizational and social. Within this view, it is acknowledged 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. As well, one of the most important aspects on USR model is internal management, because it is relative to members of the academic institution, that is, those who design plans and university strategies (*Aldeanueva, 2011*).

In line with this, the main focus of this paper is to analyse the view of students regarding human resources management (HRM) as internal impact of social responsibility in the University. Based on the above-mentioned objective the authors formulated the following questions research:

- Which is students' perception regarding responsible HRM in higher education?
- Which are the items that universities should give more importance from students' point of view?
- Are there differences between responsible HRM practices perceived and desired by students?

According to this focus, the paper is organized as follows. First, we review the concept of USR. Second, we analyse impact-based model of USR. Then, a survey study devoted to analyse students' perceptions regarding responsible HRM in higher education settings is presented. Finally their implications for improving universities' management are discussed.

2. Literature review on university social responsibility (USR)

The application of social responsibility in the field of higher education implies, among other issues, the identification of the university stakeholders and their perceptions of satisfaction and quality of service, the knowledge of their expectations and the establishment of means of dialogue with these groups as well as know the impact of four process that form responsible management: educational, cognitive, social and organizational (*Vallaey's, 2008; Vallaey's et al., 2009; Vallaey's, 2014*). Thus, according to Social Council of Huelva's University (2009), USR is defined as a "*new way of functioning of the university, [...] based on a more fluid and direct relationship between the university and its social environment, for it takes into account the effects impact the activity and expectations of the university generates both in their members (professors and researchers, other staff and students) and society,*" (p. 15).

In sum, it is very important to define the four impacts in order to explain the impact-based model of USR and, then we are going to analyse the aim of this study, internal management impact.

Firstly, *educational impact*, universities have to get a responsible civic and professional education among their students through of ethics, sustainability and responsibility teaching. Thus, universities are responsible of processes of teaching, learning and values education (*Aldeanueva, 2011; Vallaey's, 2008; Vallaey's et al., 2009; Vallaey's, 2014*). It is very important for customers and future professionals to be informed and receive and responsible education (*Gasca & Olvera, 2011; Martí et al., 2008*) because they will lead future changes worldwide.

Secondly, *cognitive impact*, universities have to spread ethical guidelines, theoretical approaches, lines of research and production and divulgation of knowledge to get a social

management of knowledge (Aldeanueva, 2011; Vallaeys, 2008). In order to do that, research for development is to be fostered in every way.

Thirdly, *social impact*, it is necessary to links between the university and external stakeholders and their participation in the political, social, economic and cultural development of society (Aldeanueva, 2011). The aim of this impact it is to get a social collaboration promoting joint learning communities for sustainable development. That is, collaborate with researchers and professors from different departments to implement and manage development projects which could become resources for applied research and teaching in universities' communities. Therefore social impact goes beyond humanitarian activities isolated from higher education (Muñoz et al., 2010; Vallaeys, 2008; Vallaeys et al., 2009; Vallaeys, 2014).

Finally, *organizational impact*, the aim of this impact, it also called internal management; it is to get a responsible campus supported by democracy and sustainability. According to Vallaeys (2008), universities should serve as an example of democratic institution and as a model of sustainable development by means of responsible policies and strategies, openness, transparency and equity in a fair and objective way. It is necessary to clarify that the university as any organization, generates impacts on the lives of its administrative staff, faculty and students and in the environment – i.e. waste, deforestation or air pollution (Domínguez Pachón, 2009). Therefore has an internal responsibility for aspects such as:

1. Labour relations of staff.
2. Participation of the university community in university life.
3. The guarantee of democracy and sustainability in the institution.
4. Efficient sustainable use of material, financial and infrastructure resources.
5. Conducting ethical financial investments.
6. The use of responsible criteria in public tenders.
7. A sustainable relationship with suppliers and customers (Rodríguez Fernández, 2010).

In parallel, it is necessary to explain that it produces a transfer of *Triple Bottom Line* (Elkington, 1997) from typical proposed model of CSR to the case of university. That is, any organizations' profits are connected with the environmental and social impacts they cause, and it creates risks, opportunities and changes in the game. This concept, also known in terms of "*people, planet, profit*", have three impacts: an economic responsibility, an environmental responsibility and a social responsibility (Elkington, 1997). And as a consequence, any model of social responsibility has to take into account these *three dimensions* (UMA, 2007 cited in Aldeanueva, 2011):

- *Environmental*: which it comprises all actions taken by university that have an impact on ecosystems, land, air and natural water systems.
- *Economic*: which it covers activities undertaken by university that have an impact on the economic conditions of its stakeholders and local, regional, national and international economic systems.
- *Social*: which it incorporates the actions taken by the university that have an impact on the social conditions of its stakeholders.

Finally, to date, most previous research on USR has been developed in Latin American universities and it has been based on educational impact (Vázquez et al., in press). Nevertheless, and in spite of the important social function of universities, there is still little research that includes university stakeholders as the subject of research (Larrán et al., 2012) except for some empiric articles. However, lots of data on ethical education (Dellasportas, 2006; Lutar & Karri, 2005; McDonald, 2004), CSR education (Muijen, 2004; Matten & Moon, 2004; Setó-Pamiés et al., 2011) and universities and business schools sustainability

(*Ceulemans & De Prins 2011; Galang, 2010; Tilbury, 2011*) can be found in many reference books. In this context, the principal aim of this paper is to identify students' perception about internal management, analyse the differences between perceived and desired importance of HRM responsible practices in university and their implications for university strategies.

3. Methodology

According to the purposes of the research, we conducted a survey study in Spain in order to analyse students' perceptions of responsible HRM within a public university. Participants in this survey, we collected data from a sample of university students, as main stakeholders of higher education institutions.

3.1. Sampling and procedure

Self-reported data was collected by means of a structured questionnaire from a total sample of 400 students at the University of León (University), ensuring a size for a representative 95% ($e = \pm 5\%$; $p = q = 0.50$). Students were selected from their last courses and among real distributions by departments and faculties. Based on these criteria, the total sample comprised 159 males (39.8%) and 241 females (60.3%) aged 19 to 32 years old ($M = 22.63$ and $SD = 2.01$).

On the other hand, the usual distinction on studies' orientations comes to the following: 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.

Perceived University HRM practices were measured defining specific practices based on previous literature (*Ceulemans & De Prins, 2011; Christensen et al., 2007; McDonald, 2004; Moon & Orlitzky, 2011; Setó-Pamiés et al., 2011; Vallaeys, 2008; Vallaeys et al., 2009*) and review of other similar instruments. Every participant was asked to use a five-point Likert type scale to grade the importance given to each activity from 1 (*not important at all*) to 5 (*very important*). Items were related to the internal management impact explained in previous sections as a part of impact-based model. Respondents were presented the following list of indicators about importance perceived and importance desired in University HRM practices, namely:

- Care and maintenance of the University ecological zones.
- Programmes to reduce natural resources consumption (e.g. water, electricity or paper).
- Using clean energy and reducing emission.
- Professional development and continuing education for faculty and staff.
- Occupational risk prevention and promotion of health and safety among staff.
- Fostering respect for diversity and equal opportunities for workers.
- Electing authorities and management bodies by means of a transparent, democratic process.
- Work-life balance for professors and staff.
- Efficient and reasonable resource distribution.
- Quality assessment of University activity.
- Economic management transparency.
- Procurement of supplies and services under responsible and sustainable criteria.

For each item, these measures were requested:

- a) *Perceived importance.* Respondents were asked to report their opinion on the importance of each practice in University activity, according to a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (not important at all) to 5 (very important).
- b) *Desired importance.* Students had to report their wish for responsible internal management on each university practice of HRM. Again, responses ranged from 1 (not important at all) to 5 (very important).

3.2. Results

Table 1 displays the response percentages and mean scores obtained for participants in the survey when asked about their perceptions of internal management in University responsible HRM practices. Items are separated in three fields, like triple bottom line (Elkington, 1997). That is, organizations have an economic responsibility, environmental responsibility and social accountability (Elkington, 1997). In general terms, average scores were above 2 in the five-point response scale, thus pointing to low expectations between students about their universities.

Table 1: Perceived importance of responsible human management in University (own study)

University HRM	1	2	3	4	5	Mean
Environmental responsibility						
Care and maintenance of the University ecological zones	17.5%	35.3%	36.0%	10.3%	1.0%	2.42
Programmes to reduce natural resources consumption (e.g. water, electricity or paper)	23.3%	37.5%	27.0%	11.8%	0.5%	2.29
Using clean energy and reducing emission	23.5%	38.5%	31.0%	6.5%	0.5%	2.22
Social responsibility						
Professional development and continuing education for faculty and staff	18.4%	39.8%	29.5%	11.6%	0.8%	2.37
Occupational risk prevention and promotion of health and safety among staff	17.8%	32.4%	35.7%	12.1%	2.0%	2.48
Fostering respect for diversity and equal opportunities for workers	20.2%	31.2%	31.8%	13.6%	3.3%	2.49
Electing authorities and management bodies by means of a transparent, democratic process	19.0%	25.3%	30.1%	17.8%	7.8%	2.70
Work-life balance for professors and staff	14.9%	29.1%	36.2%	15.7%	4.1%	2.65
Economic responsibility						
Efficient and reasonable resource distribution	15.9%	38.7%	33.2%	9.9%	2.3%	2.44
Quality assessment of university activity	17.8%	15.8%	37.1%	7.9%	1.5%	2.40
Economic management transparency	31.1%	28.8%	26.5%	11.4%	2.3%	2.25
Procurement of supplies and services under responsible and sustainable criteria	20.5%	33.8%	32.8%	11.5%	1.5%	2.40

In general, perceptions of current internal management were moderated, with a greater percentage of low scores when considering the environmental, social and economic responsible of internal management, with most items scoring under 3 in the five-point scale. Particularly, higher mean scores corresponded to *electing authorities and management bodies by means of a transparent, democratic process* ($M = 2.70$), *work-life balance for professors and staff* ($M = 2.65$), and *fostering respect for diversity and equal opportunities for workers*

($M = 2.49$) while lower mean values corresponded to *using clean energy and reducing emission* ($M = 2.22$) and *economic management transparency* ($M = 2.25$).

Anyway, as shown in Figure 1, 93% of students believed that universities aren't given enough importance to using clean energy and reducing emission and 87.8% to efficient and reasonable resource distribution. On the other hand, there do not exist significant differences among the three areas responsible of any organization: environmental, social and economic.

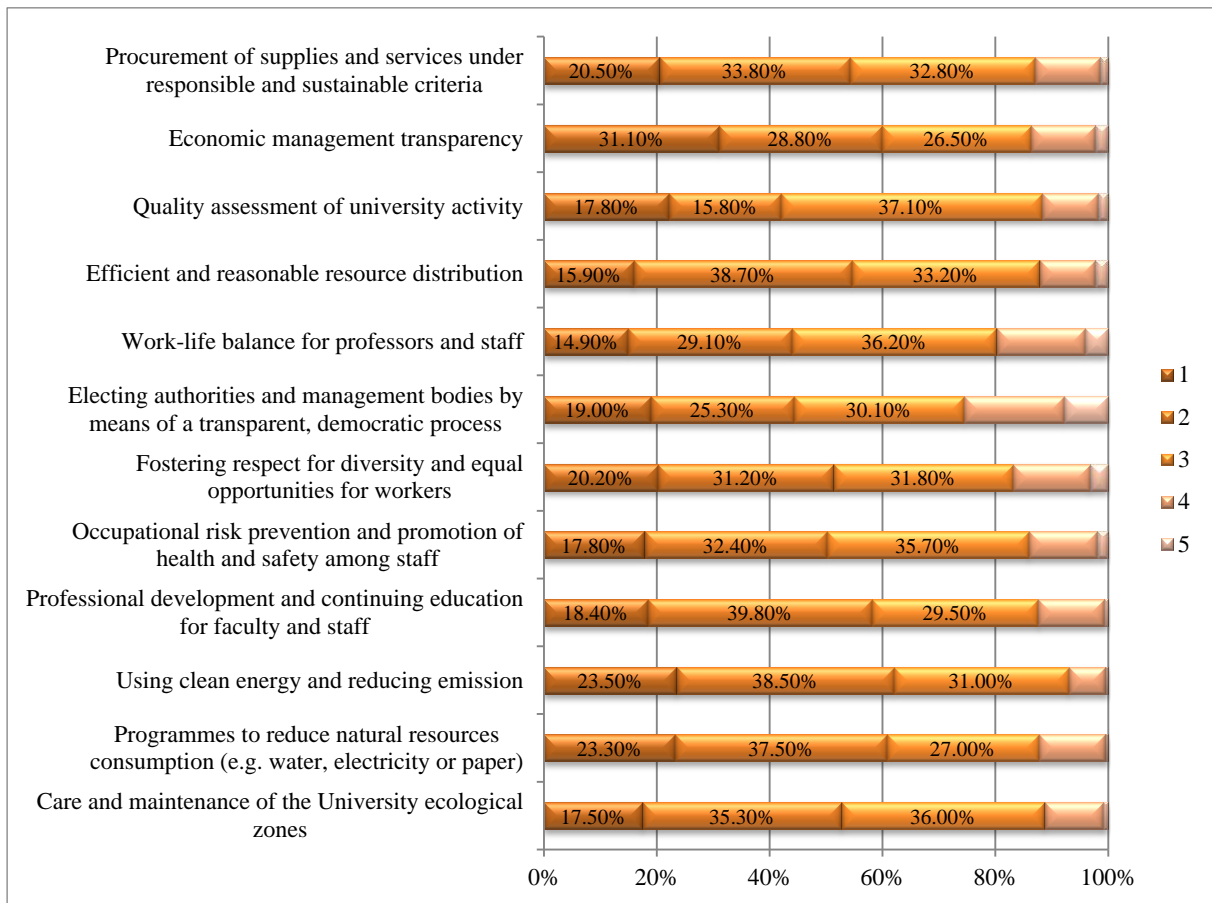


Figure 1: Perceived importance of responsible human management in University (own study)

Concerning the wish of a greater responsible human management in University, average scores were considerably high because items used to measure such variable were above the intermediate 4 in the five-point scale of response. The contents most demanded representing concerns in terms of *economic management transparency* ($M = 4.39$), *procurement of supplies and services under responsible and sustainable criteria* ($M = 4.36$), and *professional development and continuing education for faculty and staff* ($M = 4.33$). Opposite, the least valued issues was *fostering respect for diversity and equal opportunities for workers* ($M = 3.92$).

Anyway, as shown in Figure 2, 86.5% of students affirmed that they would like University is given more importance to professional development and continuing education for faculty and staff. Further, 86% of respondents would like to procurement of supplies and services under responsible and sustainable criteria. Opposite, percentage of respondents that they would like that their University fostering respect for diversity and equal opportunities for workers, were lower, with 70.8%. On the other hand, it does not exist significant differences among the three areas responsible of any organization: environmental, social and economic.

Table 2: Desired importance of responsible HRM in University (continuation), (own study)

University HRM	1	2	3	4	5	Mean
Environmental responsibility						
Care of the University ecological zones	1.5%	1.3%	1.8%	40.5%	45.0%	4.26
Programmes to reduce natural resources consumption (e.g. water, electricity or paper)	0.3%	2.5%	14.3%	39.0%	44.0%	4.24
Using clean energy and reducing emission	0.0%	2.3%	13.0%	36.8%	48.0%	4.31
Social responsibility						
Professional development and continuing education for faculty and staff	0.8%	2.0%	10.8%	36.6%	49.9%	4.33
Occupational risk prevention and promotion of health and safety among staff	0.0%	4.8%	17.0%	36.1%	41.9%	4.15
Fostering respect for diversity and equal opportunities for workers	3.3%	5.3%	20.6%	37.4%	33.4%	3.92
Electing authorities and management bodies by means of a transparent, democratic process	0.5%	3.0%	14.3%	37.3%	44.9%	4.23
Work-life balance for professors and staff	0.8%	1.8%	15.3%	34.7%	47.5%	4.26
Economic responsibility						
Efficient and reasonable resource distribution	0.8%	2.3%	12.6%	35.9%	48.5%	4.29
Quality assessment of university activity	1.3%	3.3%	18.0%	34.3%	43.1%	4.15
Economic management transparency	1.0%	2.0%	11.6%	27.6%	57.8%	4.39
Procurement of supplies and services under responsible and sustainable criteria	0.3%	1.8%	12.0%	34.0%	52.0%	4.36

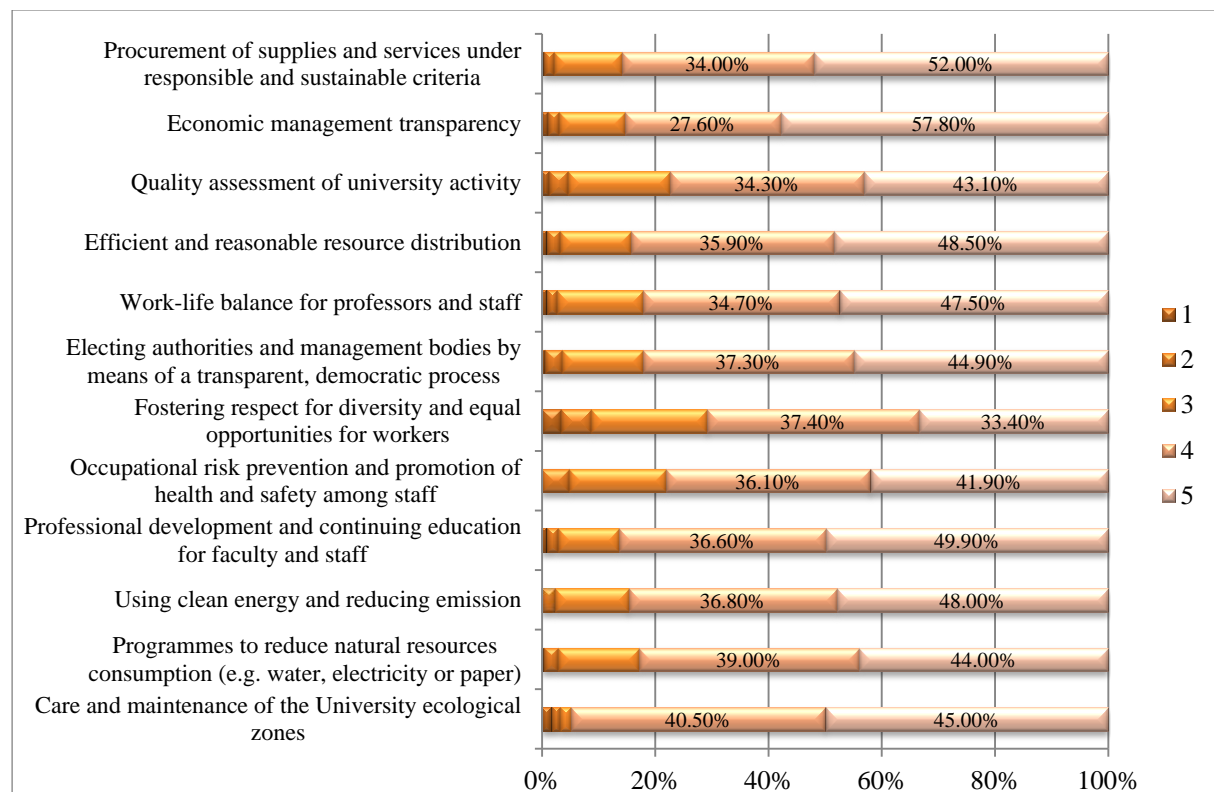


Figure 2: Desired importance of responsible human management in University (own study)

opportunities for workers (Gap = 1.84) which coincide with students' perceptions about items University implemented more.

7. Conclusion

This study has been devoted to analyse the concept of responsible human management by a sample of students in a Spanish University, just as their given and desired importance on the matter as part of responsible social university and, by this mean, generate basic information useful for Universities in the design and implementation of their marketing strategies according to USR. Around these general purposes, three main conclusions of this study can be stressed.

Firstly, results stated as in previous studies (*Burcea & Marinescu, 2011; Larrán et al., 2012*) that awareness of the importance of responsible human management in organizations is notably widespread among students, thus reaffirming the idea that socially responsible internal activities contribute to universities' ability to satisfy for their students, improve their prestige and attract new students.

From this point of view, the internal management practices considered by most students as more for their university implemented are: electing authorities and management bodies by means of a transparent, democratic process work-life balance for professors and staff and fostering respect for diversity and equal opportunities for workers because it is known that civil servant have to better labour conditions and students participate in authorities elections. Furthermore, these three items are social and the reason of this election is social practices are more promoted by University because of it has a social mission. On the other hand, practices such as using clean energy and reducing emission and economic management transparency were less importance according to current University students' perceptions. These responses are due to University hasn't never been a transparent organization in economic field or hasn't divulged their environmental programmes as well as these items cause long-term results, thus, students do not know these areas.

Secondly, items most demanded by students are: economic management transparency, procurement of supplies and services under responsible and sustainable criteria and professional development and continuing education for faculty and staff because a good professors, sustainable supplies and understanding of the entire university internal management generate trust and better quality in the organization. On the other hand, practices such as occupational risk prevention and promotion of health and safety among staff and fostering respect for diversity and equal opportunities for workers were less desired because students consider these rights have been achieved many years ago by universities.

Thirdly, findings made obvious some existing gaps between perceived and desired importance awarded to HRM practices in University, showing a high demand of professional development for faculty and staff, economic management transparency and contracts a under responsible and sustainable criteria because students need a better quality education and the crisis and corruption problems in Spain have caused high demand of transparency in public organizations.

In sum, results are consistent with previous impact-based model studies (*Burcea & Marinescu, 2011; Larran et al., 2012*) whose findings show that universities do not provide the necessary USR information, do not communicate properly and transparently. This situation causes that students do not identify responsible behaviours in education, investigation, responsible HRM and external projection of University. Thus, University strategies should lead in direction to get a socially responsible university that it provides an internal quality management for major university stakeholders, the students. Furthermore, Universities should do an effort to be transparent and inform all their stakeholders their

internal management with the aim to get their loyalty, trust and a higher participation in responsible practices.

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