NEW TOOLS FOSTERING HUMAN POTENTIAL THROUGH INTERNAL SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

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Abstract

Theoretical study deals with the theme of internal social responsibility in relation to the human potential. Nowadays there are many available alternatives in the journey to Corporate Social Responsibility for companies. A change in the organizational structure that includes a specific department for promoting responsibility should be a great idea. However, human potential could be considered by engaging employees in social responsibility as a good starting point. Trying to improve the knowledge in this understudied topic or research, this work explores the internal (and sometimes hidden) side of social responsibility in organizations. There are in fact many mechanisms of human resources management available to engage employees in CSR such as finding and developing talent within the organization with the ability and willingness to carry out internal social entrepreneurship projects. This and other measures are analyzed from a theoretical point of view and a conceptual model is developed for a better understanding of the new tools fostering internal social responsibility. We conclude that responsible business behavior and social values also should include internal aspects of management related to intra-organizational elements, organizational capabilities, and human resource management.

Key words: social responsibility, internal social responsibility, employees, human resource management, personnel.

Classification JEL: M12 – Personnel Management.

1. Introduction

Nowadays the business and the academic world have embraced the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) logic. CSR concerns organization's ability and willingness to meet the economic, legal, social and environmental interests of stakeholders. CSR refers to a company's voluntary activity that appears to further some social good, beyond the interests of the firm, and that which is required by law *(Aminia & Bienstock, 2014)*.

Bowen (1953) could be considered the founder of CSR thinking in business. Wood *(1991)* and the well-known Carroll *(1991, 1999)* considered CSR as a form of business response to new demands on society. CSR today implies that any business has responsibilities beyond profit-seeking and must to conduct entrepreneurial actions in a manner that meets also social and environmental standards according to the Triple Bottom Line *(Elkington, 1994)*.

It could be said that organizations that make efforts to be good citizens will be more successful. The importance of CSR is evident for the economy in general, and for the competitive success of each company in particular, given the competitive advantages resulting from responsible actions *(Gallardo-Vázquez & Sánchez-Hernández, 2014)*. At this respect, Lounge and Wallace *(2008)* have cited some important benefits of CSR programs such as employee recruiting and retention, risk management, brand differentiation and avoidance of Government interference or excessive regulatory intervention. The business case for CSR has been concretized in reducing costs and risks, developing reputation and legitimacy and creating strategic win-win situations able to gain and consolidate competitive advantage creating shared value *(Porter & Kramer, 2006; 2011)*.

Parket and Eilbirt *(1975)* started to remark a new trend in business forty years ago based on social actions. Today Corporate Social Responsibility is still considered a global trend incorporating business, corporations, states, international organizations and civil society organizations *(Shalhin-Andersson, 2006)*.

According to the *Stakeholders Theory (Freeman, 1984)* it is expected that companies behave ethically and engage in philanthropic activities and it is generally recognized that CSR has two dimensions. The external dimension of CSR has been deeply analyzed in academic literature focused on how companies interact with their external stakeholders. However, the internal side of CSR (called ISR), that remains understudied despite some exceptions such as the recent work of Sánchez-Hernández et al. *(2016),* has the emphasis on employees.

General CSR strategies have a strong link with human potential development. In fact HRM for employee' potential development and employee's commitment is one of the main challenges managers face, particularly in companies with a high proportion of knowledge workers. Mason and Simmons *(2013)* say that employees expect CSR values similar to other stakeholders arguing that employees seek functional, economic, psychological, and ethical benefits from their employing organizations. In this sense, if employers provide challenging, stimulating and fulfilling work, some functional benefits will be obtained and also it will be perceived as indicative of a socially responsible employer and a main driver of Internal Social Responsibility (ISR) practices *(Mont & Leire, 2009).*

The purpose of the present article is to develop a framework for better understanding ISR, based on the scarce academic literature on the topic. This paper is organized as follows: After this introduction to understand the meaning of the CSR concept, the inclusion of the function of CSR in the organizational structure is explained as a good driver to follow the CSR journey. Later, an explanation of the meaning of the internal side of social responsibility is offered as an alternative to become responsible from the human resource (HR) function. Complementarily, this is followed by the selection and analysis of different mechanisms of human resources management (HRM) to engage employees in CSR. The article ends with conclusions highlighting future research directions.

2. Two complementary ways for CSR strategy implementation from the organizational point of view

Companies have different available alternatives for implementing a strategy based on CSR. We analyze two complementary ways. First we consider the creation and inclusion of a department devoted to CSR into the organizational structure. Later, we consider and analyze the possibility to foster ISR trough the HRM department as a medium stage to consolidate the CSR in the future.

2.1. A CSR department into the organizational structure

In the field of Business Administration, and more specifically in the area of Business Organization, it has been shown that there is a strong link between the organizational structure and the business strategy, where the structure appears as a fundamental element for the implementation of the established strategy *(Chandler, 1962, 1977; Andrews, 1980).* Organizational strategy exerts a significant impact on organizational efficiency and therefore we can say that the structure must follow the strategy avoiding the classical debate between structure and strategy *(Olson, Staler & Hult, 2005).* Otherwise, when the evolution of the strategy is not accompanied by the parallel evolution of the organizational structure, the company will assume a certain risk of inefficiency.

Nowadays, organizations are increasingly interested in relationships and issues about fairness and trust. Considering the existence of both, the CSR department and the HRM department, different possibilities emerge when considering their level of development and their level of implementation in the company. The best situation for both areas will be the maximum coordination, considering that the social responsible principles and values are

included into the vision and mission of the company. At the same time the HRM is strategic and is considered part of the core business.

According to Lozano & Camps *(2008),* Figure 1 shows several theoretical stages for the relationship between CSR and HRM that define the transit from the non-existent synergy between the areas to its full implementation. In the middle of the journey, and considering that in practice the HRM function is more developed and implemented in companies than the CSR function, the ISR appears as a necessary step where many companies could invest time and resources in order to attain the maximum linkage in the future.
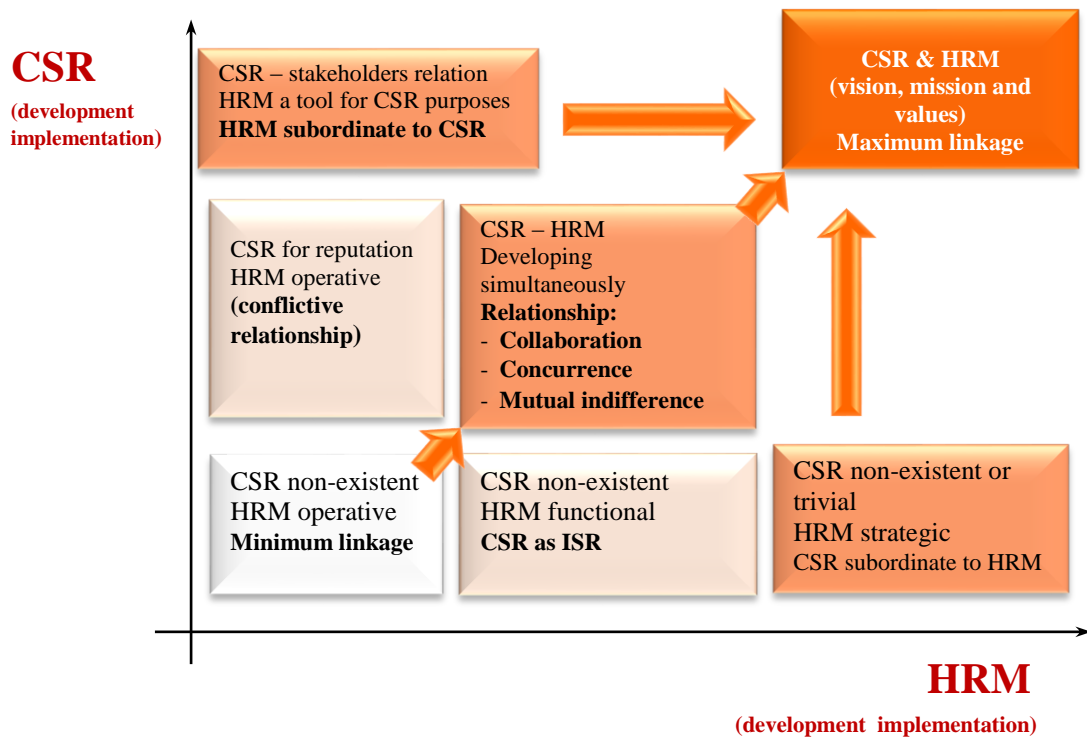
CSR
(development implementation)

CSR – stakeholders relation HRM a tool for CSR purposes **HRM subordinate to CSR**		**CSR & HRM (vision, mission and values) Maximum linkage**
CSR for reputation HRM operative **(conflictive relationship)**	CSR – HRM Developing simultaneously **Relationship:** - **Collaboration** - **Concurrence** - **Mutual indifference**	
CSR non-existent HRM operative **Minimum linkage**	CSR non-existent HRM functional **CSR as ISR**	CSR non-existent or trivial HRM strategic CSR subordinate to HRM

HRM
(development implementation)

Figure 1. Relationship between CSR and HRM (own processing from Lozano & Camps, 2008)

The *marginal stadium,* although we do not like, is quite common and occurs in companies where the level of implementation and development of HRM is so low and the CRS area is non-existent. In such contexts human capital has no consideration as source of competitive advantage. The function only considers basic instrumental actions related to a rudimentary management limited to recruitment or salary management and all this in order to keep legality, if not avoid it. In this situation the CSR has no roots in the culture of the organization and any advancement of the HRM may be a trigger for the parallel development of responsibility.

The *virtuous stadium,* when CSR fit HRM – this stadium is characterized by high-performance HRM and high-grade CRS. It is the stage in which the understanding between the HRM function and the CSR function is strong and nonnegotiable. In this situation, both HRM and CSR are at a high level of development and walk hand to hand. Both functions participate in strategic decision-making at the company, in which undoubtedly are actively involved. Good HR practices have a clear ethical and responsible component. This is obvious in relation to the handling of redundancies and policies on diversity and work-life balance or policies on employee learning and development. At this stage the importance of HRM is recognized in the company and the principles of responsibility and sustainability are in the vision of the leaders, are shared by all employees and are embodied in the mission and values of the organization explicitly.

But, it is well known, that there are a broad range of organizational styles for including the CSR and the HRM into the structure. The optimum structure depends on the maturity of both areas in the company, on the issues faced, and on the organizational style and culture. Nowadays, the HRM function has gained a relatively good position into the organizational structure of medium and big competitive companies. However, sometimes the inclusion of a team or department devoted to CSR into the organizational structure is not easy, or simply it is not possible when considering the characteristics of the company, specifically size. In this case, it is strongly recommended that the function of HR assumes the role of fostering ISR through responsible HR practices in order to inside in CSR as is explained in next section.

2.2. Fostering ISR trough HR department

The traditional organizational approach from the point of view of marketing focuses on clients and markets, with a special emphasis upon attracting and retaining clients as a profit. However, from the CSR organizational approach there is insistence upon the importance of every stakeholder and subsequently in both external and internal clients. In this context, employees are considered internal clients to be satisfied *(Grönroos, 1990; Berry, 1991)*. As a key stakeholder of the company, the employees should not be seen as cost to be managed, but as an asset to be valued and developed *(Zappala, 2004)*. According to Svensson and Wood *(2005)*, the workforce is the most valuable asset of a company. Even we can say the employees are the most strategic stakeholder, and their involvement in CSR should impact significantly on the organization's triple bottom line *(Elkington, 1994)*.

According to Takala and Pallab *(2000)*, employees have to be socialized into the fact that along with the firm, they are responsible for morally right. It is assumed that successful ISR can lead to important payoffs for an organization *(Arnett, Laverie & McLane, 2002)* such as an improved ability to implement changes, increase in service quality, low employee-turnover rates or high levels of employee satisfaction. At this respect, Ardichvili *(2013)* suggests that CSR, sustainability and ethics are parts of the same organizational subsystem, shaped by a complex interaction with organizational culture, human capital and individual moral development. HRM can influence this system by engaging culture change efforts, ethics and CSR on all levels of the organization.

There are not an accepted definition for ISR but we can defined the term as an umbrella concept overlapping with some, and being synonymous with other, conceptions of responsible HR practices. Although ISR seems to be a concept under construction, we consider that:

- ISR is one of the most important components of building a successful responsible company.
- ISR must help employees contribute to accomplishing external social responsibility goals.
- ISR makes internal management efforts enhancing human potential and permitting companies to create competitive advantages to become much more likely to succeed in their markets.

Although the ISR is understudied, next section indicates which are the HR practices more related to ISR and its relationship with CSR.

3. Selected HR mechanisms to engage employees in CSR

The HR function is changing more rapidly than we can imagine. The function must respond by taking advantage of current practices and human potential development. CSR is a challenge for HR function. In order to incorporate responsibility into the function and to engage employees into the process, different practices could be fostered.

The system of HR is configured through five different subsystems according to Chiavenato *(2004)*. They are the following: (i) Provision of HR subsystem (recruitment and selection); (ii) Application subsystem (description and analysis of positions); (iii) HR Maintenance Subsystem (performance evaluations, plans of wages and of social benefits, hygiene and safety on the workplace); (iv) HR Development Subsystem (training and development of human resources programs); (v) HR Control Subsystem (database and information systems and HR auditory systems).

The way to conduce these subsystems should be responsible or not depending on the enterprises objectives and strategy. When the company wants to get competitive advantages through CSR practices, the ISR has to be reinforced. The rest of the section is dedicated to indicate HR practices for each subsystem that are fostering human potential trough ISR. Figure 2 as follows shows the theoretical model.
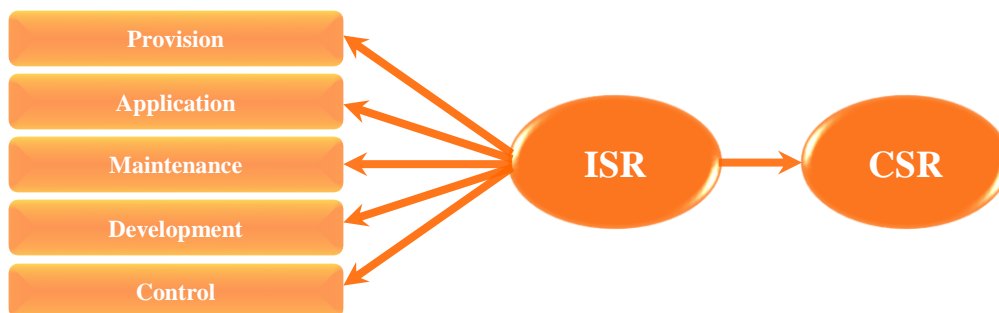

Figure 2. Theoretical model: ISR subsystems and its relation to CSR (own study)

Provision

According to the resource-based view of the firm, a sustained competitive advantage is crated when implementing a value creating strategy not simultaneously implemented by any competitor and when these other firms are unable to duplicate the benefits of this strategy *(Barney, 1991)*. While there are many different resources that may serve as a source of competitive advantage, an important one is the knowledge embedded in employees *(Jackson, Hitt, & DenNisi, 2003)*. Because of that, the HR provision is strategically important for organizations. Regarding the practice of staff recruiting, selection and socialization, it is possible to list the most common practices related to social responsibility:

- The commitment with the job creation *(Bischoff & Wood, 2013)*.
- The equal opportunities for all employees *(Turker, 2009; Agudo-Valiente, Garcés-Ayerbe & Salvador-Figueras, 2012; Lu, Lee & Cheng, 2012; Pérez, Martínez & Rodríguez del Bosque, 2012)*.
- Actions devoted to support the employment of people at risk of social exclusion *(Zinn, 2013; Hayman, McIntyre & Abbey, 2014)*.
- The company values the contribution of disabled people to the business world *(Bruyére & Filiberto, 2013; Kulkarni & Rodrigues, 2014)*.

According to CSR general principles, organizations' choices among employment options are not based solely on economic rationality but social rationality. A key challenge for responsible provision of HR is to better understand how to manage employees with different skills for competitive success.

Application

The description and the analysis of positions are the core practices related to the application subsystem. The typical job description and analysis contain the job title, number of incumbents, where it is located (referring department and work site), the purpose of the job, how is fits in

with other jobs and with the organization and its overall objectives. It also includes the major duties of this job, the specific work performed, how closely is supervised and, finally the job specifications *(Milkovich & Boudreau, 1997).*

The main practice for improving the application subsystem seems to be the conciliation of professional and personal lives *(Vázquez-Carrasco, López-Pérez & Centeno, 2012; Tato-Jiménez & Bañegil-Palacios, 2015).* At this respect, the European Commission *(2006)* indicates that policies for reconciling work and private life have to contribute to create a satisfactory work/life balance while creating incentives and eliminating disincentives for people (women and men) to enter and remain on the labor market. This involves a responsible approach to work related to the application subsystem improving working-time patterns, with a better work organization guaranteeing flexibility of the workplace and support for the private needs of employees throughout their life cycle. It includes also kinder gardens, after-school activities, care services for the elderly people and other dependents, for instance.

Maintenance

Regarding the practice of staff performance evaluation, or different plans of wages, social benefits, hygiene and safety on the workplace and other related issues included into the maintenance subsystem, we highlight as follows the practices more related to CSR according to the literature review.

- The interest in the employee's quality of life *(Sánchez-Hernández & García-Míguelez, 2013; Cullinane et al., 2014).*
- The standards of health and safety beyond the legal minimum considering that every company has to fulfill the law *(Lozano & Huisingh, 2011).*
- The importance of payments of wages above the industry average and the existence of pension plans *(Amstrong, 2012; Esping-Andersen, 2013).*
- Employee compensation related to their skills and results *(Cohen, 2010; Long & Perumal, 2014).*

Given their high strategic value and uniqueness, core knowledge employees are most likely to contribute directly to an organization's core competencies on the basis what they know and how they use their knowledge *(Purcell, 1999).* As a result, a responsible maintenance subsystem will invest in employees by implementing a commitment-based HR system as defended by Lepak and Snell *(2002).*

Development

The development subsystem is considered one of the most relevant in fostering human potential. Academic literature includes two complementary ways for linking CSR and HRM. On the one hand, the training and development programs for employees *(Turker, 2009).* On the other hand, the organization of volunteer activities in collaboration with NGOs *(Sánchez-Hernández & Gallardo-Vázquez, 2013; Knutsen & Chan, 2014).*

The main practice to develop responsible behavior seems to be corporate volunteering *(De Gilder et al., 2005; Laverie & McDonald, 2007).* Corporate volunteering, as part of the ISR of a company, makes HRM and CSR to meet. Volunteering provides human development opportunities and builds team work. Benefits for employees are wide-ranging, from increasing confidence to enhancing leadership. According to Peloza and Hassay *(2006, 2009),* employees who are volunteers express pride and loyalty towards the firm, and are willing to put greater effort into their work and, consequently, to be engaged with CSR programs.

A complementary way for fostering CSR through ISR comes from aligning organization's culture with a responsible strategy. It is well known that corporate culture can have a huge impact on an organization's work environment and output. According to Harrison and Carroll *(2001),* employees acquire organizational culture through socialization and it is well understood

how socialization occurs as a result of peer pressure and other influence tactics. Consequently, ISR should be able to create a responsible organizational culture in which selected employees develop the social intrapreneurship competence. This is a new concept in social management. The Figure of the social intrapreneur emerges as a guarantee of endogenous development of responsibility *(Pinchot & Pellman, 1999)*. Intrapreneurs are the employees who turn ideas into realities inside an organization *(Benitez-Amado,Llorens-Montes & Perez-Arostegui, 2010)*. The concept of social intrapreneur has recently emerged referring internal social actions to equilibrate the core business with purely social goals.

The social intrapreneurship culture is considered a causal effect of ISR. According to Nadler, Thies and Nadler *(2001),* changing an organization's culture (in this case into a culture of responsibility) comes down to directing energy toward changing four basic aspects that ISR will help to change. They are: the execution of managerial practices; the organization's basic structure, systems, and formal processes; the behavior of organizational leaders; and actions taken with opinion leaders and other individuals who play key roles in both the formal and the informal systems. ISR changes the core values of organizations and values are central to corporate culture *(Schein, 1985)*. Values are understood to influence a wide variety of specific behaviors, so after a successful strategy for ISR developing social intrapreneurs, the behaviors should follow.

Control

The HR control subsystem is supported by the human information systems (HIS) and the Key Performance Indicators (KPI) for HRM. Based on these tools HR auditory systems are used for control. A HR audit is a comprehensive method to review current HR policies and practices to identify needs for improvement and enhancement of the HR function as well as to assess compliance with ever-changing rules and regulations *(Rao, 2014)*. Bearing in mind that CSR is a new trend in business, the HR audit should involve systematically reviewing all aspects of responsible HR.

Creating a responsible employer brand is also related to the control subsystem bearing in mind that consultant firms such as *Great Place to Work* have the duty of auditing the HR practices of companies in order to create the annual rankings of employers of choice. At this respect Lawler III *(2005)* remarks that branding is a step after creating a value proposition for building an unique image that distinguishes the organization from the others. Sánchez-Hernández and García-Miguelez *(2013)* have suggested that firms may develop competitive advantages if they are perceived as attractive places of employment. So, organizations should offer a socially responsible work environment and provide a culture that reinforces CSR.

4.   Conclusions and managerial implications

CSR is about doing well by doing good but there are many available alternatives in the journey to CSR for companies and HRM can help for doing good business. CSR and strategic HRM have gained both credibility and popularity over the last decade, especially with respect to their impact on organizational performance and competitive success. In this theoretical study it has been shown how a change in the organizational structure that includes a specific department for promoting responsibility should be a great idea. However, human potential could be considered by engaging employees in CSR as a good starting point. A HR philosophy that takes as its strategic foundation a responsible HRM system could be considered a best practice. In fact, it could be considered a source of competitive advantage considering that the ISR should be aligned with the CSR reflecting the specific and idiosyncratic nature of the company that will be the basis of its inimitability.

This study has explored the still understudied internal side of CSR in organizations. Different mechanisms of HRM have been presented to engage employees in CSR such as the

ability to develop social intrapreneurs. However, the potentially favorable impact of the introduction of responsible HR practices to create an ISR culture has to be demonstrated in future research. Additional research is also needed to examine the influence of ISR on the effectiveness of CSR in companies fostering human potential trough new practices such as corporate volunteering or employer branding.

The contribution of the study is theoretical in the domain of HRM academic literature, where CSR and ISR are emerging as relevant topics. The current study determines some responsible practices included in each subsystem following the Chiavenato's framework *(Chiavenato, 2004)*. The system approach to HRM means that, although choices often exist in how to organize each subsystem, one must consider and manage those choices in conjunction with other subsystems and in conjunction with the CSR strategy. This theoretical study is a necessary step leading to the building of an instrument which will enable researchers in the field to measure the strength of the ISR and its link to CSR. We conclude that responsible business behavior and social values should include internal aspects of management related to intra-organizational elements, organizational capabilities and HRM.

The advantage of our approach is that we can complement the present academic interest in the linkage between HRM and CSR with a wider organizational factors influencing the choice of responsible HR practices. The theoretical proposals cited in this study shift the attention from isolated HR practices to a more interactive level, relating the HR practices to CSR strategy. The approach offers a fruitful perspective for organizations on the shaping of HR practices and their possible relationship with CSR.

Some *consequences* emerge from the business case for engaging employees in CSR. We can expect cost savings or risk reduction arising through employees changing the way they work, learning new skills and pursuing new goals related to CSR. Innovative ideas should come if employees can make links between the issues that matter to them and the company with CSR issues. A commitment to CSR and the employer branding related to responsible place for work should help in attracting and retaining talent. The managerial implications are for the managers to recognize the critical role of HRM in CSR initiatives and accordingly foster the implementation of better HR practices.

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