An Investigation of ISO 26000 and Social Responsibility Practices Applied in IT Companies

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ABSTRACT

Social Responsibility (SR) concerns the way in which organizations achieve their goals. This paper focuses on the overview of the SR as well as the endpoint of the continuous development of SR, the ISO 26000 standard and its core subjects. The aims are to give Information Technology (IT) professionals a better understanding of how to identify the core subjects of ISO 26000 relevant for their organizations and thus behave more responsible by taking actions towards sustainability. As stakeholders demand information and transparency from companies, it is imperative for companies them to report their environmental, economic, and social impact on the community. This paper examines the social responsibility reports, published from corporate websites of some the top IT companies in order to identify the issues that IT companies deal with, as well as in which issues related to the core subject of ISO 26000, they primary focus. The rest of the paper provides an overview on how IT companies can shift towards social responsibility and how they can integrate practices and technologies that benefit community, environment and stakeholders.

Keywords: Green Computing, IT Companies, IT Professionals, ISO 26000, Social Responsibility, Software Engineers, Sustainability Report, SR

UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Social Responsibility (SR) is a principle where the pursuit of personal profit not should take place at the expense of collective or social welfare or against future generations. In contrast, the pursuit of personal profit should be compatible with activities that improve the position of workers, promote the dignity of the individual, strengthen the protection of the environment and takes regard to the future of coming generations. Nowadays, many consumers have been upset by widely publicised

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examples of fraud by executives and harmful products produced by some companies. This has led consumers to become more aware about the organisations which they involve with and which they do business with. Consumers tend to reward companies that behave socially responsibly and punish companies that are irresponsible for their actions. Hence, the ethical consumerism has become a prominent feature of social life. Finding the cheapest price is no longer what always matters most to consumers. Instead, consumers expect the companies they do business with, to operate in a socially responsible manner. Consequently, companies must behave ethically and with sensitivity to social, cultural, economic and environmental issues. There has hence been a growing interest in SR from many organisations today, and one of the most frequently asked questions is the definition of SR and how they can operate in ways that benefit society and help improve public perception.

Due to the fact that the field of grew significantly during the last decade and different points of views have been expressed, there was a need for a consensus-based standard. The standard ISO 26000 [http://www.iso.org/iso/iso26000] was developed at the end of 2010. It integrates previous theoretical and practical insights and combines expert knowledge with the legitimisation of an international standard. The ISO 26000 standard is expected to set the norm for SR in the time to come.

**Definition of Social Responsibility**

For 40 years, SR has been discussed by academics and practiced in organisations and corporations. There are many different definitions and approaches. This exacerbates the difficulties faced by companies to identify the SR practices and executives until recently often avoided dealing with the topic.

Social Responsibility, as defined by ISO 26000, is “the responsibility of an organisation for the impacts of its decisions and activities on society and the environment through transparent and ethical behaviour that contributes to sustainable development, including health and the welfare of the society”. The fundamental characteristics of SR are the willingness of an organisation to incorporate social and environmental considerations in its decision making and to be accountable for the impacts on society and the environment. It is beyond philanthropy, it is not just to donate money to a charity. Philanthropy and SR are closely related concepts. However, philanthropy is a part of the SR.

There is a relation between the organisation and its surroundings through the social, environmental and economic sphere. There is an impact in these spheres for every action the organisation makes and every decision it takes or does not take. Any organisation influences the local or and global social reality through its decisions and actions. SR can therefore be claimed to impact on socially responsible behaviour. The three dimensions - economic, social and environmental – are the dimensions of sustainable development and should be considered equally. It should also be taken into account that they are all inextricably linked.

SR is in compliance with, but goes beyond the applicable law. It is the responsibility of enterprises beyond the mandatory obligations by force of law, but in line with social values and expectations. SR is consistent with international norms of behaviour and takes into account the expectations of stakeholders, is integrated throughout the organisation and practiced in its relationships.

Different organisations have framed different definitions, making SR a controversial topic, although there is considerable common ground between them. The voluntary characteristic of SR means that it depends on the business itself how much focus it will give to SR aspects throughout its operations and practices. Another point is that SR should be integrated into the strategic plan of the business. Therefore, every business should operate socially responsible, though all its operations and policies in a continuous way. Finally, SR is closely related to sustainable development. Sustainability aims to meet the needs of the
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