Chapter 9

Why Manage Human Resources from a Social Responsibility Perspective? 
An Analysis of the Job Seekers’ and Employees’ Perceptions

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to provide knowledge about the importance given by employees and prospect employees to different Human Resource Management (HRM) practices and, in particular, to Socially Responsible Human Resource Management (SRHRM) practices. This research also analyses 1) the differences between the importance given to conventional HRM practices and SRHRM by employees and job seekers and 2) the differences between women’s and men’s perceptions of every practice. The results confirm that respondents consider that SRHRM practices are more important than conventional HRM practices. The results also show the existence of differences between men’s and women’s perceptions. In particular, the importance given by women to SRHRM practices is higher than the importance given by men. Additionally, the results show that men are not still as concerned as women with some questions with regard to equity between men and women.

INTRODUCTION

Social concerns with regard to the business’ impact in the community and the need to achieve sustainable models of development have increased in the last years, making Social Responsibility (SR) a desirable management philosophy for organizations and society.

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Social Responsibility involves the consideration of social, environmental and economic issues when organizations are managed, going beyond taking into account legal obligations. In that context, organizations are considered a part of the society, with the obligation to act according to society’s expectations.

In addition, socially responsible behaviours can be a way of improving organizational performance, since socially responsible organizations are in a better position to face new challenges from a global competitive environment (EC, 2001). From this perspective, SR can be considered as a part of the business strategy.

From the SR perspective, companies have obligations with different stakeholder groups like employees, society, local community, consumers, customers or the environment, changing the business classic view which considers that organizations only have obligations with their shareholders.

Employees are one of the most important stakeholder groups of organizations. Good management of employees can contribute to achieve new competitive advantages, as well as other business areas. Human resource managers can consider SR principles when making decisions about their employees (Shen, 2011). This could increase both employees’ welfare and business performance. In this way, literature highlights that socially responsible human resource management (SRHRM) can increase employees’ satisfaction, commitment or personal motivation (Olcese, Rodríguez & Afaro, 2008; Chinchilla, Poelmans & León, 2003).

Human resource practices such as better balance between work, family and leisure; responsible contracting practices; equal pay and career prospects for women; greater work force diversity; better adaptation to competitive changes; promoting health at the work place, or concern for job security are considered SRHRM practices (EC, 2001).

In particular, there is a growing interest in 1) achieving a better balance between family life and work responsibilities, and 2) improving equity between men and women. Social changes like the increased presence of women in the labour market, as well as the growing number of one-parent families and couples in which members work, have contributed to the increase in the interaction between work and family roles, making this practices very attractive for employees and organizations. These practices are also relevant because difficulties to balance work and family roles can increase inequality between women and men in terms of salaries or career development.

Although many companies have included SR principles in their management practices, some studies (e.g. Xunta de Galicia, 2010) note that the recent economic global crisis could stop the implementation of socially responsible practices in the most exposed countries, like Spain. The economic crisis could also affect the importance given by employees and prospective employees to SR issues. In a context where finding a job or not to lose it is the main priority for them, SR practices could play a secondary role in their preferences.

In addition, the effective implementation and success of SR practices in workplaces depends on the acceptance by employees. For example, managers could consider that a specific practice is interesting but employees could have a different perception.

In this context, this study aims to provide knowledge about the importance given by employees and job seekers to different human resource management (HRM) practices and, in particular, to SRHRM practices. This research also analyses the:

- Differences between the importance given to conventional HRM practices and SRHRM by employees and job seekers.
- Differences between women’s and men’s perceptions of every practice.