Ethical CSR Leadership: Passion or Fashion

Linda Lee-Davies, Wroxton College UK of Fairleigh Dickinson University, Wroxton, UK

ABSTRACT

The incorporation of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in organisational strategic plans is now a norm and likely to remain a regular and increasingly significant component of the business planning activities of organisations in the future. This article looks at the ethical and non-ethical reasons company leaders have for the inclusion of CSR policies in their vision from the recent evolution of CSR to provide a Socratic forum on which the reader can begin to define ethical leadership of CSR. By investigating whether the CSR is a proactive people-led passion or a followed fiscal fashion, and examining its component parts by using an equation, it becomes clear there are many levels of reason for adopting CSR principles and practices in an organisation. This comment is then threaded through many levels of the organisation as the argument progresses to explore the impact of implementing CSR policies on different types of stakeholders. This is for the purpose of bringing into question and highlighting the ethical leadership skills necessary for successful CSR practice throughout the business, not just for the present but for the coming decades.

KEYWORDS

Business Ethics, Corporate Social Responsibility, Ethical Leadership, Philanthropy

DOI: 10.4018/IJSECSR.2017070101
INTRODUCTION

Corporate Social Responsibility has evolved with a large number of definitions through its recent evolution over the last fifty years and indeed can mean different things to different people and different organisations. Equally, it can be implemented at different degrees and levels in an organisation so occupying and being regarded at different levels of importance in business. CSR adoption has been largely voluntary to date though some companies may have mandatory reasons for its presence in their strategy, (Gatti et al., 2018).

Often confused with Corporate Philanthropy in that it is a financial giving back of a more charitable nature (Mitnick, 1995), the evolution of the conceptual understanding of Corporate Social Responsibility has embraced the changing and more alert awareness of current and future demand on resources and the disproportionate global distribution of those resources in countries in different stages of development. The charitable default may be a component part of why organisations embrace CSR in that they genuinely want to give back, or at least be seen to be doing so in some cases, but in reality, it is not enough. The economics of demand, the legalities of duty and the moralities of an ethical example showing an example setting accompany the philanthropic desire (Carroll 1991) to form a base for organisational CSR strategies to permanently operate in ways which augment local, regional, national and global society. This would ensure it is taken seriously and not considered corporate claptrap (Legrain, 2002). So, CSR is a complicated mix of organisational philanthropic and economic intent and this mix varies widely across the many different agendas of businesses wanting to help others and wanting to help themselves. Indeed, organisations have a capacity for social changes through the adoption and promotion of CSR strategies and therefore an increasing ethical responsibility to support and use it wisely, (Gaither et al., 2018).

Identifying, the core intention of the organisations is difficult as CSR can be threaded through the corporate strategy for different reasons. It can be complicated to isolate the original philanthropy as it develops within the economic umbrella of the corporate structure, vision and strategy for competitive advantage. The motivation for this paper is not to judge the reasons organisations adopt CSR, merely to explore them. It is not to create a new definition of CSR, merely to break it down for easier isolation of where philanthropy lies in the equation and thus to reveal that whether it is a passion or a fashion, it has great value. Leaders are then able to sport their ethical approaches and outcomes even where it is adopted for commercial reasons in the beginning.

From the first developing concepts of the social responsibilities of organisations (Bowen, 1953) where business was being considered something more than a profit-making enterprise to current expectation that it is a key component, or even in some cases a driving component in business strategies, CSR has almost indefinably (Kakabadse, Rozuel et al., 2005) sat between duty and compromise, perched on top of charitable activities and underpinned environmental sustainability as modern business pushes global resources to a point of concern for the future. This shows
Profits or Employment: Priorities of Future Managers

[www.igi-global.com/article/profits-or-employment/219266?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/profits-or-employment/219266?camid=4v1a)