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Corporate sustainability and responsibility toward education

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to deliberate on how corporate social responsibility (CSR) ought to be reconceived for better educational outcomes. It suggests that there are win-win opportunities for corporations and national governments to nurture human capital and address any skill gaps and mismatches in the labour market.

Design/methodology/approach – The businesses' involvement in setting curriculum programmes may help to improve the quality and effectiveness of extant educational systems. This contribution reports on how different organisations are already engaging in responsible behaviours with varying degrees of intensity and success across many contexts.

Findings – Many firms are often training and sponsoring individuals to pursue further studies for their career advancement. It also indicated that there are businesses that are engaging in laudable behaviours to attract prospective employees. Moreover, this paper contends that the provision of education, professional development and training will boost the employees' morale and job satisfaction, which may, in turn, lead to lower staff turnover rates and greater productivity levels in workplace environments.

Social implications – This contribution implies that organisational cultures and their business ethos could be attuned with the governments' educational policies to actively respond to the diverse needs of today's learners and tomorrow's human resources.

Originality/value – There is a business case for CSR as the corporations' strategies realign their economic success with societal progress. Arguably, there is potential that such responsible behaviours can bring reputational benefits, enhance the firms' image among external stakeholders and could lead to a favourable climate of trust and cooperation within the company itself.

Keywords Organisational development, Corporate social responsibility, Corporate responsibility, Public policy, Human resource management and development, Employee/community engagement

Paper type Conceptual paper

Introduction

During their learning journey, individuals acquire knowledge and skills that ought to be relevant for their career endeavours. The provision of quality education and its assurance is the responsibility of national governments. Yet, business and industry seldom offer training to human resources that supplements formal education (McKenzie and Woodruff, 2013; Reichheld, 1992). Very often, educators are expected to respond to challenging issues such as skill shortages and mismatches where candidates lack certain competencies, although they attended compulsory education (Allen and De Weert, 2007). Their knowledge and skills may be too deep to bridge through corporate training sessions. Perhaps, there is an opportunity for global businesses to compensate for this deficiency in the education (Gibb, 1993). Corporations can shift their operations



where it is viable for them to tap qualified employees. However, the constraints on their growth can be halted by the broad impact of inadequate education and training in some industries or regions. In this light, this paper contends that big businesses may become key players in addressing unmet needs in education. Several companies have the resources and the political influence to help improve educational outcomes, which will, in turn, help them cultivate local talent. Leading businesses are already devising corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes that are actively supporting education across many contexts.

Therefore, this contribution redefines the private sector's role in education. It posits that there are win-win opportunities for companies and national governments, as they nurture human capital. Indeed, companies can create synergistic value for both business and society (Camilleri, 2015). In the main, such a strategic approach may result in new business models and cross-sector collaborations that will inevitably lead to operational efficiencies, cost savings and significant improvements to the firms' bottom lines (Pearce and Doh, 2012; Porter and Kramer, 2011). Notwithstanding, the businesses' involvement in setting curricula may also help to improve the effectiveness of education systems in many contexts (Azevedo *et al.*, 2012; Seethamraju, 2012). Businesses can become key stakeholders in aligning educational programmes with their human capital requirements in the job market (Walker and Black, 2000). There is a possibility that their CSR programmes could reconnect their economic success with societal progress.

Research objectives

This conceptual paper explains that there is scope for businesses to engage further with key stakeholders including educators and policymakers. It makes reference to a number of responsible firms that have earned high credentials among their staff and prospective employees, as they made discretionary investments in social capital. From the outset, this research describes certain behaviours that bring economic and societal value. It indicates that there is a business case for the provision of education, lifelong learning and the ongoing training of human resources. Moreover, this paper also suggests that it is in the businesses' interest to keep and maintain good relationships with governments, trade unions and society. A collaborative stakeholder engagement will ensure that there are adequate levels of performance in areas comprising work-life balance, flexitime, employee health and safety, suitable working conditions, sustainable environmental practices and the like. Notwithstanding, this paper encourages continuous dialogue and constructive communication with educational stakeholders for the formulation of curriculum programmes that are consonant with the businesses' requirements.

Corporate social responsibility and human resources management

Many academics argue that the most successful CSR strategy is to align a company's social and environmental activities with its business purpose and values (Visser, 2011; Porter and Kramer, 2011). Responsible actions have the power to reconceive the organisations' purpose and values towards society. The first step towards developing a CSR mentality is to re-define the principles of the company. Arguably, the role of senior management is crucial in instilling an ethos for genuine CSR behaviours among employees. Businesses know that prospective employees consider a variety of factors, as they evaluate careers. Some individuals value financial incentives, including salary, bonus potential and benefits (Gerhart and Fang, 2014; Bloom and Milkovich, 1998).

Others may focus on professional development, advancement opportunities and location (Kehoe and Wright, 2013; Hunt and Michael, 1983). However, only recently, multinational companies seem to realise that through CSR they can better engage with their employees (Bhattacharya *et al.*, 2008). Evidently, CSR can provide incentives to employees that may potentially be even more alluring than money (Branco and Rodrigues, 2006).

Socially responsible human resource management affects employee task performance and extra-role helping behaviour (Shen and Benson, 2014; Korschun *et al.*, 2014). In fact, their empirical results indicated that CSR that is directed towards employees is an indirect predictor of individual task performance and extra-role helping behaviour. Another study by Deloitte (2004) has yielded very similar results. Of US respondents, 72 per cent indicated that they would opt to work for a company that also supports charitable causes, if they had to choose between two jobs offering the same location, job description, pay and benefits. According to this study, the majority of the youngest survey participants have indicated that their decision to work for their current employer was based on company culture or reputation (Pfeffer, 2007; Deloitte, 2004). Evidently, these respondents also valued the opportunities for growth and development as well as their salary and benefits package. This Deloitte study has indicated that the CSR agenda will remain relevant for tomorrow's business leaders. Apparently, the youths' generic characteristics may bring distinct CSR behaviours (Pomeroy and Dolnicar, 2009). Young people often place high importance on making a positive impact on society. Very often, organisations are capitalising on corporate influence on social trends including sport activities (Smith and Westerbeek, 2007). Such a viewpoint could encourage an examination of the overlaps between the social responsibilities of sport and business.

These findings seem to suggest that employees want to belong to an organisation that stands for more than financial performance (Korschun *et al.*, 2014; Vanhamme *et al.*, 2012; Tang *et al.*, 2012). Employees are attracted by companies that are truly CSR-oriented. In addition, the businesses' genuine intentions and goodwill can help to improve the brands' image among stakeholders. Thus, even if employees do participate in CSR initiatives, they still want to be associated with an organisation that cares about its social impact (Shen and Benson, 2014). Therefore, it is in the companies' self-interest to underline their CSR performance during events that are aimed to attract top talent. Apparently, more companies are realising that CSR is a great opportunity to engage with employees and to illustrate their commitment to the community at large.

Several studies have measured both employees' attitudes and work behaviours of those who actively participated in their respective companies' CSR programmes. The findings indicate that the employees that were actively taking part in charitable causes and philanthropic initiatives felt a sense of identification with their respective companies (Vanhamme *et al.*, 2012; Kotler and Lee, 2008). Interestingly, other studies reported that corporate social performance was also correlated to improved job performance (Tang *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, it transpired that the employees that were emotionally connected with their company were more likely to remain committed towards their employer. The CSR initiatives often reveal the companies' underlying credentials. Hence, social responsibility can be considered as part of the employees' value proposition (Ulrich and Brockbank, 2005). Such a proposition can be described as the balance of benefits that employees receive in return for their performance

(Korschun *et al.*, 2014). Moreover, the employment value proposition can also be a plausible way for companies to retain their employees (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004). Arguably, CSR can help to augment the employers' reputation and image for job prospects (Kiessling *et al.*, 2015; Melo and Garrido-Morgado, 2012). As a matter of fact, relevant research suggests that those candidates whose values match those of the firm will inevitably feel satisfied in their job (Korschun *et al.*, 2014). It will be very likely that they remain longer with their employer.

Another survey had also mirrored these findings. It found that the employees' engagement in CSR have led to a sense of pride in the company (De Roeck and Delobbe, 2012). This was, in turn, positively correlated to employee performance (Singhapakdi *et al.*, 2015; Bucuniene and Kazlauskaite, 2012) and negatively to intention to quit (Ghosh and Gurunathan, 2014). Moreover, other findings indicated that employee engagement was also positively related to customer focus and pro-company citizenship behaviours (Harter *et al.*, 2002). For instance, those companies that possess high CSR credibility often experience a lower turnover rate than their competing firms (Lee *et al.*, 2013). Curiously, the companies that pride themselves in experiencing the highest retention of employees will also have the greatest customer retention (Harter *et al.*, 2002). Such findings could be attributable to many issues. The employees' CSR engagement could also be connected with their leaders' CSR ethos (Fombrun, 2005). Therefore, the management could be considered as main actors and drivers for socially responsible behaviours (Aguilera *et al.*, 2007).

Many studies have indicated that the managements' values and beliefs will inevitably effect employee engagement in CSR as well as their companies' competitiveness. For example, Jenkins (2006) posited that employees looked up to their senior management as they championed CSR issues. On the other hand, Entine (2003) argued that corporations are continuously judged on how employees are treated. Brammer *et al.* (2007) suggested that external CSR is positively related to organisational commitment and that the contribution of CSR to employee morale and commitment is at least as great as job satisfaction. Undoubtedly, the CSR initiatives will affect an organisation's human environment (Porter and Kramer, 2006).

Social and sustainable initiatives can be a possible reason why prospective employees decide to join and remain at a particular company. The businesses that are socially responsible with their human resources are noticing higher job satisfaction levels and better employee morale. A major concern in many industry sectors is attracting quality employees and their retention. Davidson *et al.* (2010) noted that because of high staff turnover rates in the hospitality industry, there was an increasing pressure for ongoing training to maintain the highest levels of service.

For these reasons, organisations ought to recognise the effect of CSR on employee recruitment and retention. Googins *et al.* (2007) maintained that companies need to engage their people not simply as employees, but rather in their multiple identities as workers, parents, community members, consumers, investors and co-inhabitants of the planet. Lately, many employers are becoming more sensitive to the work-life balance of their human resources. The personal circumstances of employees may demand flexible working times or reduced working hours. For instance, employees may need to look after their children or to family members in need of care. Notwithstanding, employees may also require sponsorships to pursue professional training courses (McKenzie and Woodruff, 2013). Their studies could also necessitate their temporary absence from

work. Unfortunately, the work–life balance may not always be a viable option. Owing to the particular nature of work across many industries, the employees may be required to work unsocial hours.

Burke and Logsdon (1996) noted that employees indicated that the CSR programmes were most effective in organisations that hailed from environmental and energy or utility sectors. However, they also suggested that the government, retail and technology organisations were laggards in this regard (UNEP, 2011; Brighter Planet, 2010). It goes without saying that environmental organisations tend to have a highly competent workforce on green issues (employees who are knowledgeable on sustainability innovations; Renwick *et al.*, 2013). In contrast, the government and manufacturing workers possess lower green credentials. Hence, the nature of the industry could dictate how companies may champion CSR issues (Jamali *et al.*, 2015a, 2015b; Jenkins, 2006). For instance, energy and utility organisations tend to be the most frequent promoters of energy conservation. On the other hand, the manufacturing businesses are usually renowned for their engagement in reusing, reducing and recycling resources.

The size of a company could possibly affect the employees' engagement in CSR practices (Baumann-Pauly *et al.* 2013; Orlitzky *et al.*, 2011). Surprisingly, the smaller organisations are increasingly promoting the use of sustainable actions (Jamali *et al.*, 2015a, 2015b). Several studies suggest that both large and small businesses are equally effective in their CSR engagement (Jenkins, 2006). However, Nielsen and Thomsen (2009) held that internal communications may be uniquely important to small and medium-sized enterprises that frequently do not afford significant public relations budgets to communicate externally. CSR engagement may prove the most challenging among businesses with diverse cultures and complex supply chain networks (Ciliberti *et al.*, 2008). Notwithstanding, some of the smaller companies may have less bargaining power to persuade their suppliers to alter their sustainable and socially responsible practices.

Sometimes, employees are inspired to implement given initiatives at their own homes. Another aspect is the businesses' responsibility in managing the safety and well-being of staff within their premises' (Cornelius *et al.*, 2008; Carroll, 1999). Generally, many multinational organisations may have made suitable arrangements for health, safety and welfare issues. Big businesses are expected to comply with the relevant national legislations in this regard. It is the corporation's responsibility to ensure that the workplace environment complies with the relevant laws, rules and regulations. Very often, the multinational organisations behave responsibly. The majority of them adhere to ethical norms and internationally recognised standards.

Management may also engage with employees, as they can involve them on the companies' most important issues. When the human resources are delegated with certain duties and responsibilities, they may become motivated in their workplace environment. Continuous communication and dialogue with employees are some of the key elements for a successful workplace (Camilleri, 2015). Generally, businesses can get more from their staff in terms of ideas, commitment and loyalty (Bhattacharya *et al.*, 2008; Reichheld, 1992). CSR can create a good working atmosphere, where there are better relationships and trust through internal participation, motivation and high spirits (Jenkins, 2006). In a similar vein, Pedersen (2010) remarked that managers need to express their broader responsibilities in treating employees with dignity and respect and stimulate an inspiring, fun and dynamic workplace. Indeed, CSR has the potential to

instil “a sense of belonging” among employees (Murillo and Lozano, 2006). Hence, certain employers offer incentives and employee reward schemes which are aimed at boosting their employees’ productivity (Gerhart and Fang, 2014). Such initiatives can nurture greater employee commitment and motivation (Herzberg *et al.*, 2011). Therefore, engagement with employees is not acquired through financial compensation. Companies are no longer assuming that salaries and financial benefits alone will buy employee commitment (Herzberg *et al.*, 2011). Companies should address their employees’ inherent needs including self-esteem, self-development and work–life integration. Bhattacharya *et al.* (2008) held that the businesses’ CSR initiatives are an effective means to meet these emotional needs. They argued that CSR humanises the company in ways that other facets of the job cannot. In their words, a pay check may keep individuals on the job, but it will not keep a person on the job emotionally.

Furthermore, it is in the interest of business to be mindful of employees who may be expecting far more than salary and benefits from their employer. Today’s businesses ought to discover ways to engage with employees’ to increase their loyalty (Bhattacharya *et al.*, 2008). For instance, employers could identify segment-specific needs for their human resources in the same way that they use “benefit segmentation” to target customers (Moroko and Uncles, 2009). Many businesses are striving to differentiate themselves by looking after the human element (Porter and Kramer, 2006). Very often, the focus is to improve the human resources’ competencies by organising continuous professional development and on-the-job training sessions and courses to all employees (McKenzie and Woodruff, 2013). Relevant courses may obviously help to improve the businesses’ performance levels. Evidently, considerable financial and human resources are being devoted to train employees to perform at the required service levels. The larger businesses are often delivering education and training programmes about their environmental awareness and sustainable development practices along other operational courses and training.

Corporate social responsibility and education

Businesses and governments play essential roles in overcoming regional skills gaps and skill mismatches (Allen and De Weert, 2007). However, they rarely engage with each other in meaningful ways. Businesses that transcend these matters can make a profound impact on their own human resource needs and on the wider societal needs of the region. There is an opportunity for corporations to build regional collaborations with educational institutions, governments and non-profits. These fruitful relationships could address unemployment and competitiveness issues (Gibb, 1993). All this is also consonant with the notion of shared value (Porter and Kramer, 2011). This perspective is a management strategy that could bring corporate financial performance (Tang *et al.*, 2012). Businesses can engage themselves in philanthropic causes and stewardship principles to unleash shared value for business and towards society (Porter and Kramer, 2011, 2006). Arguably, companies can employ philanthropy to complement their long-term corporate sustainability and responsibility (Visser, 2011). Business could allocate scarce resources to educational and training institutions to strengthen their long-term workforce needs. Nowadays, there are many successful collaborative agreements involving corporations and government. For instance, the New Employment Opportunities (NEO) Initiative consisted of five of Latin America’s leading employers, including Walmart, Caterpillar, Microsoft, CEMEX and McDonalds (FSG,

2014). These corporations have joined forces with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the International Youth Foundation (IYF) with the underlying objective to train one million youth in Latin America and the Caribbean by 2022 (FSG, 2014). Across the region today, 32 million young people (one in every five aged 15 to 29 years) are neither in employment nor at school. Admittedly, half of the employers in this region struggle to find qualified employees. Evidently, the NEO initiative has helped to address these crises by launching large-scale training programmes that include technical and life skills, internships and job placement services.

NEO's founding partners have jointly committed \$37 million in cash and in-kind resources. Every company contributed \$5 million, as well as technical expertise on workforce needs, internships and entry-level jobs for programme graduates (FSG, 2014). IDB and IYF have also been key brokers of the initiative, as they worked with companies to define common job competencies. It transpired that they engaged more than 300 training partners. As a result of their collective effort, these companies have benefited from a new talent pool that has addressed their labour requirements. By working together, the NEO's partners have created a far more robust and cost-effective training and placement programme than any one business could build by itself. Such conventional programmes may strengthen the employees' skills and training requirements (Allen and De Weert, 2007). Many companies are increasingly organising CSR initiatives that create both business and social value (Porter and Kramer, 2011). They aligned their CSR programmes with employee competencies to build internal capacity and resource pools. The creation of new systems that better connect education to employment will also require standards and curricula that align with labour market needs (Walker and Black, 2000; Gibb, 1993). Arguably, companies ought to forge meaningful relationships with educators to develop and deliver relevant curricula that can extend far beyond isolated workforce development programmes.

For instance, Cisco, a provider of networking equipment, has created more than 10,000 networking academies across 165 countries (Camilleri, 2014). A total of 4.75 million individuals have improved their employment prospects, as they attended training to become network administrators. At the same time, these individuals have increased the demand for Cisco's equipment. Similarly, SAP and Verizon have often partnered with local universities and education institutions to deliver courses, career coaching and customised degrees on site for employees (Camilleri, 2014). The companies have discovered that employees that pursue such programmes are more likely to remain loyal to their company. Naturally, it is in the interest of employees to attend educational programmes that may ultimately lead to their career progression and better prospects (Kehoe and Wright, 2013). Evidently, such laudable behaviours are being taken on board by numerous multinational corporations. For instance, Intel has invested in training programmes and partnerships that strengthen education (Camilleri, 2014). The company has recognised that its business growth is constrained by a chronic shortage of talent in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) disciplines. Through programmes like Intel Math and Intel Teach, the global multinational has delivered instructional materials, online resources and professional development tools for hundreds of thousands of educators across the USA. Their students' have acquired STEM and other twenty-first century skills, including critical thinking with data, as well as scientific inquiry. This is a relevant example of a corporate business that has

successfully addressed its workforce needs. Intel has recognised specific skill gaps in its central areas like technology and engineering (Camilleri, 2014).

Intel has committed itself for further discretionary investments in education. The company has created higher education curricula in demand areas like microelectronics, nanotechnology, security systems and entrepreneurship. Undoubtedly, Intel's efforts affected millions of US students (Camilleri, 2014). At the same time, the company has increased its productivity and competitiveness. In a similar vein, SAP employs people with autism in technology-focused roles. In doing so, SAP concentrates on these individuals' unique strengths. This way, the company can gain access to a wider pool of untapped talent that will help to foster a climate of creativity and innovation.

In addition, there are many big businesses that contribute in stewardship, charitable and philanthropic causes (Vanhamme *et al.*, 2012). In the past, the GE Foundation has supported systemic improvements in urban school districts that were close to GE's business. These investments have surely helped to close the interplay between corporate sustainability and responsibility (CSR) and corporate philanthropy (Porter and Kramer, 2002), while strengthening GE's long-term talent pipeline. Many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are capable of developing better connections between education and employment. For instance, in Africa, the Rockefeller Foundation has invested \$100 million in its Digital Jobs Africa initiative to connect one million disadvantaged youth with jobs in the growing technology sector (Rodin and Lore, 2013). Equally important, the Foundation has acted as a neutral broker by convening the private sector and government to create long-term partnerships and new pathways to employment. NGOs themselves play an essential role in helping companies implement shared value initiatives. When companies enter new markets, NGOs can help them understand the local needs and context. NGOs can also help implement educational programs in circumstances where normal corporate profit margins are unattainable. In turn, NGOs that adopt a shared value approach can access the full range of business resources and expertise beyond philanthropy to better serve their constituents (Porter and Kramer, 2002). Education for Employment (EFE), for example, has partnered with companies that face skills challenges in the Middle East and North Africa by providing job training and placement for more than 10,000 unemployed youth since 2006, nearly half of whom are women (Rockefeller Foundation, 2013; FSG, 2014). By partnering with companies to help them fill their talent needs, EFE has also met its own mission more effectively than it could by working alone.

Corporate social responsibility and stakeholder engagement

Recently, there was an increase in traditional forms of employee volunteerism as an avenue for CSR engagement (Pelozo *et al.*, 2009). Some programmes have even led to more employee volunteerism when they were off from work. For instance, many corporations, including Charles Schwab, Dell, General Mills, Google, Hewlett-Packard, Johnson & Johnson, Medtronic, Merrill Lynch, Nationwide, REI and Target had partnered with VolunteerMatch, a national online volunteer matching service that help employees find volunteer opportunities in their neighbourhoods (Volunteer Match, 2007). It transpired that several multinational firms have brought volunteering within their facilities (Pelozo *et al.*, 2009). Timberland had even inaugurated an in-house day-care centre. This company maintained that CSR is inextricably linked to the company's core business. Other businesses have also initiated certain volunteering

programmes that involved the utilisation of their employees' skills and competences. For example, Deloitte created IMPACT Day, where the company dedicated a day in a year to carry out community service. Deloitte maintained that its professionals engage themselves in skill based projects (Deloitte, 2015). Its employees have applied their expertise in mentorship, consulting and business issues. Moreover, the international audit firm also claimed that it has created valuable societal opportunities based on individual skill development.

Skill-based CSR allows employees to volunteer and make a difference in their communities (Allen and De Weert, 2007). Notwithstanding, it also provides them with numerous opportunities to practice the precise skill sets that are needed in their workplace. In a similar vein, IBM's Corporate Service Corps had serviced NGOs in some emerging markets. Past projects have included many assessments on product effectiveness and developing marketing plans for their Romanian clients. IBM's Corporate Service Corps had also analysed supply chains in Ghana and developed business plans and financial management strategies for the Wildlife Foundation in Arusha, Tanzania (FSG, 2014; Volunteer Match, 2007).

Evidently, many employee volunteering programmes are instilling knowledge, skills and competences among vulnerable people in society, particularly the young unemployed individuals. It may appear that it makes more sense to teach these young persons to do something than to finance them. Various companies are aware that the younger employees' perceptions of CSR are an incredibly important consideration for their corporate reputation and standing. Young adults and adolescents seek more responsibility and advancement opportunities (Hunt and Michael, 1983). Generally, they are eager to work with and learn from older mentors. It may appear that they prioritise such qualities over job security (Herzberg *et al.*, 2011).

Arguably, the shared value perspective could create a common framework that enables companies, governments, multilaterals, private foundations and NGOs to combine their different strengths in mutually reinforcing ways (Camilleri, 2015; Porter and Kramer, 2011). Yet just as shared value could necessitate a mind-set shift for companies, it also requires other stakeholders to think differently. Of course, national governments are responsible for the provision of education. It sets curricula and learning outcomes for students. Yet, education could establish certain incentives that may encourage businesses to participate in educational programmes where they could be rewarded for their valuable engagement (Brenzitz and Feldman, 2012). This may possibly require that governments to adopt a proactive stance in re-defining quality, strengthen their assessment methods as well as data collection systems (Camilleri, 2015). The educational objectives will inevitably vary across different jurisdictions, and these are based on certain socio-economic, cultural and ideological factors. However, the educational outcomes ought to instil knowledge, skills and competencies in students that are needed for their individual development, civic participation and gainful employment (Herzberg *et al.*, 2011). At present, there are many global initiatives that are aimed at taking promising steps to align learning measures across countries. However, further effort is needed to create the much desired standards for educational effectiveness across borders. Corporate philanthropic funding can possibly encourage incentives and fruitful investments in the realms of education (Porter and Kramer, 2002). Philanthropic funders can also help to forge stakeholder relationships among businesses, educators, policymakers and the civil society.

Conclusions and implications

This contribution maintains that it is in the private sector's interest to actively participate in reconceiving education for societal wellbeing. It posits that there are win-win opportunities for companies and national governments, as they cultivate human capital. Indeed, companies can create synergistic value for both business and society. In the main, such a strategic approach can result in new business models and cross-sector collaborations that will inevitably lead to operational efficiencies, cost savings and significant improvements to the firms' bottom lines. The shared value initiatives can also help organisations to improve the recruitment and retention of talented employees. This paper has reported that employees want to be part of organisations that demonstrate their concern for society. There was mention of strategic philanthropic initiatives that manifest such concern that satisfy much of these aspirations. Organisations can use effective CSR communications to attract the best employees. Of course, they are encouraged to treat them as internal customers. In a sense, it is critical for businesses to recognise their employees' needs and wants. Arguably, the organisational culture and its commitment for CSR engagement can play an integral role. Perhaps, businesses should involve their employees in CSR activities along with other stakeholders. Evidently, CSR and sustainability issues are increasingly becoming ubiquitous practices in different contexts, particularly among the youngest work force. This contribution suggests that there is a business case for responsible behaviours. Besides, minimising staff turnover, CSR may lead to strategic benefits including employee productivity, corporate reputation and operational efficiencies. Therefore, CSR can be the antecedent of financial performance (e.g. towards achieving profitability, increasing sales and return on investment).

Notwithstanding, the businesses' involvement in setting curricula may also help to improve the effectiveness of education systems across many contexts. Businesses can become key stakeholders in this regard. Their CSR programmes can reconnect their economic success with societal progress. They could move away from seeking incremental gains from the market. Proactive companies who engage in CSR behaviours may possibly take fundamentally different positions with their stakeholders – as they uncover new business opportunities. Indeed, businesses could inspire their employees, build their reputations in the market and, most importantly, create value in education. This movement towards these positive outcomes may represent a leap forward in the right direction for global education.

This contribution has given specific examples of how different organisations were engaging in responsible behaviours with varying degrees of intensity and success. It has identified cost-effective and efficient operations. It reported measures which were enhancing the human resources productivity. Other practices sought to engage in philanthropic practices and stewardship principles. At the same time, it was recognised that it was in the businesses' interest to maintain good relations with different stakeholders, including the regulatory ones. Evidently, there is more to CSR than public relations and greenwashing among all stakeholder groups (including the employees, customers, marketplace and societal groups). Businesses ought to engage themselves in societal relationships and sustainable environmental practices. Responsible behaviours can bring reputational benefits, enhance the firms' image among external stakeholders and often lead to a favourable climate of trust and cooperation within the company itself (Herzberg *et al.*, 2011). This paper reported that participative leadership will boost the

employees' morale and job satisfaction which may often lead to lower staff turnover and greater productivity in workplace environments. However, it also indicates that there are many businesses that still need to realise the business case for responsible behaviours. Their organisational culture and business ethos will inevitably have to become attuned to embrace responsible behavioural practices.

Governments may also have an important role to play. The governments can take an active leading role in triggering corporate responsible behaviours in the realms of education. Greater efforts are required by governments, the private sector and other stakeholders to translate responsible behaviours into policies, strategies and regulations. Governments may give incentives (through financial resources in the form of grants or tax relief) and enforce regulation in certain areas where responsible behaviour is necessary. The governments ought to maintain two-way communication systems with stakeholders. The countries' educational outcomes and curriculum programmes should be aligned with the employers' requirements (Walker and Black, 2000). Therefore, adequate and sufficient schooling could instil students with relevant knowledge and skills that are required by business and industry (Allen and De Weert, 2007). The governments should come up with new solutions to help underprivileged populations and subgroups. New solutions could better address the diverse needs of learners. This paper indicated that there is a scope for governments to work in collaboration with corporations to nurture tomorrow's human resources.

It must be recognised that there are various business operations, hailing from diverse sectors and industries. In addition, there are many stakeholder influences, which can possibly affect the firms' level of social responsibility towards education. It is necessary for governments to realise that it needs to work alongside the business practitioners to reconceive education and life-long learning. The majority of employers that were mentioned here in this paper were representative of a few businesses that hailed from the developed economies. There can be diverse practices across different contexts. Future studies could investigate the methods how big businesses are supporting education. Future research on this subject could consider different samples, methodologies and analyses which may obviously be more focused and will probably yield different outcomes. However, this contribution has put forward the "shared value" approach. It is believed that because this relatively "new" concept is relatively straightforward and uncomplicated, it may be more easily understood by business practitioners themselves. In a nutshell, this synergistic value proposition requires particular focus on the human resources' educational requirements; at the same time, it also looks after stakeholders' needs (Camilleri, 2015). This notion could contribute towards long-term sustainability by addressing economic and societal deficits in education. A longitudinal study in this area of research could possibly investigate the long-term effects of involving the business and industry in setting curriculum programmes in education. Presumably, shared value can be sustained only if there is a genuine commitment to organisational learning for corporate sustainability and responsibility, and if there is a willingness to forge genuine relationships with key stakeholders.

Recommendations

It may appear that the notion of shared value is opening up new opportunities for education and professional development. Evidently, there are competitive advantages

that may arise from nurturing human resources. As firms reap profits and grow, they can generate virtuous circles of positive multiplier effects. Many successful organisations are increasingly engaging themselves in socially responsible practices. There are businesses that are already training and sponsoring individuals to pursue further studies for their career advancement (McKenzie and Woodruff, 2013; Kehoe and Wright, 2013; Hunt and Michael, 1983). It may appear that they are creating value for themselves as well as for society by delivering relevant courses for prospective employees. In conclusion, this contribution puts forward the following key recommendations to foster an environment where businesses become key stakeholders in education:

- Promotion of business processes that bring economic, social and environmental value.
- Encouragement of innovative and creative approaches in continuous professional development and training in sustainable and responsible practices.
- Enhancement of collaborations and partnership agreements with governments, trade unions and society in general, including the educational leaders.
- Ensuring that there are adequate levels of performance in areas such as employee health and safety, suitable working conditions and sustainable environmental practices among business and industry.
- Increased CSR awareness, continuous dialogue, constructive communication and trust between all stakeholders.
- National governments ought to create regulatory frameworks which encourage and enable the businesses' participation in the formulation of educational programmes and their curricula.

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