

Chapter 14

Innovation in Higher Education: The Experience of Socially Responsible Universities

Dolores Gallardo-Vázquez
University of Extremadura, Spain

M. Isabel Sánchez-Hernández
University of Extremadura, Spain

M. Luisa Pajuelo-Moreno
University of Sevilla, Spain

ABSTRACT

The issue of Corporate Social Responsibility has received increasing attention over the last few years. Organizations are introducing socially responsible practices in their strategies in order to be more competitive. At the same time, universities are also aware of the importance of the triple organizational vision (economic, social and environmental) and they are making a lot of actions to improve their performance. In this chapter, the authors state that innovation in Higher Education is an important fact and express the experience of innovation from socially responsible universities. These entities have to know their current state and the future demands from the different stakeholders with the intention of satisfy them. This chapter studies how to drive innovation and how to structure it at the university context, how to inform about University Social Responsibility and, finally, the benefits for socially responsible universities. Finally, in this chapter the authors link three important topics today: Corporate Social Responsibility, Universities, and Innovation. As a result, they propose a set of aspects in which Universities could innovate by improving their social responsibility.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, various circumstances are affecting the development of economic issues, such as the process of globalization in which we are im-

mersed, the internationalization of capital markets and their important transparency, aspects which have clearly determined the focus of organizations towards an harmonious, responsible and sustainable development (Bansal, 2002; Lizcano, 2002;

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Figge & Hahn, 2004; Anderson & Bieniaszewska, 2005; Mikkila, 2005; Oskarsson & von Malmborg, 2005; Hahn & Scheermesser, 2006; Gallardo & Castilla, 2007), i.e., working in a way that implies a certain Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). The issue of CSR requires that the field will not simply integrate CSR into existing models but will also examine some of the underlying beliefs of those models that are challenged by CSR, because social and environmental policies are not philanthropy, not public relations, and not marketing, but social and environmental issues can affect its financial performance, so new concerns such as equity and efficiency presented by the CSR in a globalized world (Heal, 2008).

Consequently, the consideration of this concept involves integrating it in defining organizational strategy (Lyon, 2004; Anderson & Bieniaszewska, 2005; Oskarsson & von Malmborg, 2005; Secchi, 2006). This means that, today, as part of its strategy, every organization will provide voluntarily social responsibility information that will not damage or their own interests or those of third parties, that is, to offer a socially responsible behavior (Gallardo & Castilla, 2007), what has been accompanied by an increase in accounting research in this field (Van der Laan Smith, Adhikari & Tondkar, 2005). In the new economy, we can say that a number of factors have changed the equation of sustainability, to the point that “the failure to incorporate the principles of sustainability in economic practices will push the company / organization to “hit the wall” both socially and ecologically” (Bell, 2002, p.3). What we cannot fail to admit is that today very few organizations remain immune to the developments taking place in recent years, referred for responsible practices.

The European Union (EU), an institution that is betting on the homogenization of socially responsible actions, published in 2001, the report called “Green Book. Promoting a European framework for corporate social responsibility”. This document defines CSR as “the voluntary integration by companies of social and environ-

mental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders” (EU, 2001, p.20). Corporations increasingly adopt CSR program to “contribute to a better society and a cleaner environment” (EU, 2001, p.5). Recently, this definition has been renewed pointing “the responsibility of enterprises for their impacts on society” and making explicit reference to the need for collaboration with stakeholders to “integrate social, environmental and ethical concerns, respect for the human rights and consumer concerns into their business operations and core strategy” (EU, 2011, p.7). Although CSR is recognized as a viable route to solve poverty, social exclusion, and environmental degradation (Merino & Valor, 2001; Van Marrewijk, 2003; Velásquez, 2012).

Other definitions from business, academic or professional context have also been provided. De la Cuesta, Valor, Sanmartín & Botija (2002, p. 11) refers to “the recognition and integration in their operations by the company or organization, of social and environmental concerns, leading to business practices that meet those concerns and define their relationships with their partners”. Corporate sustainability means to Bell (2002, p.4) “internalize social and environmental responsibilities within a new business strategy so that train company to deliver ongoing benefits to current and future generations of shareholders, employees and other stakeholders”. Hemming, Pugh, Williams & Blackburn (2004, p.104) considered that it is “to achieve a better quality of life for everyone, now and for future generations”, which means addressing the social, economic and environmental demands of businesses to achieve a defendant CSR within a context marked by dialogue with the different stakeholders. It is evident the need to use resources for CSR in a more prudent manner, from a social perspective, in order to achieve an increase in the efficiency of the company. In this sense, McWilliams & Siegel (2001, p.125) refer indicating a level of CSR to maximize profits while satisfying the demand for CSR from multiple external agents. Similarly, Lyon (2004, p.136) indicates

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