

Chapter 15

Improvement in Higher Education: The Role of Chairs in University Social Responsibility

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ABSTRACT

Given the current context of globalization, institutions of higher education must implement the strategy of university social responsibility in order to be more competitive. The attention paid to relevant agents of interest becomes of utmost importance since this strategy highlights the links that universities and companies can generate. Although the first alliances in corporate social responsibility in Spain were terminated between companies and entities of the third sector, later, this kind of collaboration was established by universities. This has included the creation of academic chairs in corporate or university social responsibility. Their fundamental purpose is to promote socially responsible behaviors through training and initiatives, including a series of projects that can lead to clear improvements in higher education. Universities are nourished by their contacts with companies and other institutions and the financial support that this collaboration entails, while companies benefit from universities' contribution of knowledge that can be shared with society at large.

INTRODUCTION

The process of globalization and internationalization of capital markets and the importance of transparency are some aspects that have clearly encouraged organizations' increased focus on harmonious, responsible, and sustainable development (SD) (Lizcano, 2002; Figge & Hahn, 2004; Anderson & Bieniaszewska, 2005; Mikkila, 2005; Oskarsson & von Malmborg, 2005; Hahn & Scheermesser, 2006; Gallardo & Castilla, 2007). This implies working in ways that include a significant level of corporate social responsibility (CSR). Consequently, the practical considerations of this approach involve integrating it into a defined organizational strategy (Lyon, 2004; Anderson & Bieniaszewska, 2005; Oskarsson & von

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Malmborg, 2005; Secchi, 2006). This means that, currently, as part of their strategy, every organization voluntarily provides social responsibility (SR) information that does not damage their own interests or those of third parties but, instead, constitutes socially responsible behavior (Gallardo & Castilla, 2007).

The European Union (EU) published a report in 2001 with the title “Green Book: Promoting a European Framework for Corporate Social Responsibility.” This document defines CSR as “the voluntary integration by companies of social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders” (EU, 2001, p. 20). Recently, this definition has been revised to include “the responsibility of enterprises for their impacts on society,” making explicit references 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). CSR is recognized as a viable route to solving the problems of poverty, social exclusion, and environmental degradation (Van Marrewijk, 2003; Merino & Valor, 2011; Velásquez, 2012). At the same time, CSR must include relationships with stakeholders, which ensure the satisfaction of all parties and the achievement of specific benefits derived from these collaborations. CSR relationships were studied by De la Cuesta, Valor, Sanmartín, and Botija (2002, p. 11), who defined these as “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.”

More specifically, this chapter addresses the concept of university social responsibility (USR), which leads to a special type of collaboration as a source of competitive advantage. Universities have been perceived by society as institutions seeking knowledge and truth and applying these to solve the complex problems of society (Brubacher, 1982; Lukman, Krajnc & Glavic, 2009; Gallardo-Vázquez, Sánchez-Hernández & Pajuelo-Moreno, 2015). Universities, thus, play an important role in society and have a high level of responsibility due to their societal influence. The literature on this topic stresses that universities have a mission to ensure their actions have a positive impact on the surrounding society (Gallardo-Vázquez et al., 2015). Therefore, universities—as public and private organizations—are called to engage in responsible initiatives in terms of the classic triple bottom line: economic, social, and environmental impacts. Concurrently, the functions of universities are related to teaching, researching, and promoting a fairer society. When universities’ duties are seen through the prism of CSR, the relationships between universities and society consistently have a dual character (Gallardo-Vázquez & Sánchez-Hernández, 2013).

Many studies have stressed the significance of higher academic institutions in their role as promoters of USR. For example, Hansen (2006) highlights the ethical and responsible nature of university training programs. Leitao and Silva (2007) propose that universities can integrate the analysis, implementation and assessment of CSR policies and, in this way, play a strategic role in developing policies related to CSR initiatives. Jabbour (2010) and Nejati, Salamzadeh, and Sharafi (2010) argue that universities can have a significant environmental effect on their society by teaching and training students to behave responsibly. Burcea and Marinescu (2011) examined the perceptions of university students toward their institutions’ CSR initiatives. Ahmed (2012) and Dahan and Senol (2012) examined how universities drive CSR in society, concluding that universities must have strong SR policies that are implemented internally and fully supported by top administrators. These studies point to the importance of USR from the point of view of different interest groups, indicating the breadth of its impacts.

This chapter argues that USR is a tool capable of implementing the mechanisms that lead to SD. SD could be the unifying theme and/or normative ideal that is being used to motivate and integrate social, environment, and ethical concerns within CSR and social accounting (Unerman, Bebbington, &

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