


The Impact of Design Thinking, as an Innovation Management Practice, on CSR Commitment: An Action–Research

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study examines the impact of integrating design thinking as an innovation management practice on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) within a mining company. By employing exploratory action research, the study focuses on how design thinking influences CSR practices, particularly in human resources and operational processes. The findings reveal that design thinking significantly enhances CSR commitment. Human resource factors, such as embracing diversity, boosting employee motivation, and valuing expertise, play a crucial role. Additionally, process improvements, including the removal of organizational barriers and balancing operational and exploratory innovation, further reinforce the company's CSR engagement.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

In the current context of intensifying global competition, companies are compelled to continually innovate in order to sustain their competitive advantage. Simultaneously, CSR is emerging as a strategic imperative, compelling organizations to voluntarily integrate social, environmental, and economic concerns into their operations. This dual imperative of innovation and CSR raises the critical question of how these two dimensions interact and reinforce one another.

While many studies have focused on exploring the impact of CSR commitment on innovation dynamics within companies (Orlitzky & al., 2003; Porter and Kramer, 2006; Hull and Rothenberg, 2008; Surroca and Waddock, 2010; Bocquet & al., 2013), it is equally relevant to examine the inverse relationship, namely how innovation practices can foster a stronger, more strategic CSR commitment (McWilliams and Siegel, 2000; Wagner, 2010; Gallego-Álvarez & al., 2011; Flammer, 2015; Liao and Long, 2016).

This article seeks to investigate this area by employing the concept of design thinking, an innovation management approach that prioritizes individuals at the center of creative processes, and to analyze its implications for corporate social responsibility (CSR) engagement.

1.2. Research Problem

Since its inception and up to 2018, the innovations implemented within the mining group – subject of this study – were primarily incremental, aimed at the continuous improvement of operations without substantial strategic transformation. While this approach generated growth, it remained predominantly centered on economic and technical aspects, with limited engagement in social and environmental issues.

In 2018, in response to increasing CSR and sustainable innovation challenges, the company decided to revise its innovation strategy by integrating the design thinking model through a program named “Why Not” (WN). This marked the beginning of a new era for the group, where innovation was redefined not merely as a tool for enhancing operational efficiency but as a strategic lever.

This strategic evolution raises a critical issue: the potential of design thinking to transform the CSR approach in areas such as working conditions, relationships with partners, environmental respect, community involvement, the embedding of corporate values, and certification processes. This leads to the following research question:

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