

***Corporate Social Responsibility, Sustainability,
and Ethical Public Relations: Strengthening
Synergies With Human Resources***

Reviewed by

Julia Gessner and Denise Bortree, Pennsylvania State University

*Corporate Social Responsibility, Sustainability, and Ethical Public
Relations: Strengthening Synergies With Human Resources*

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Fortune 500 corporations reportedly spend an excess of \$15 billion a year on corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, with that number expected to rise (O’Keefe, 2016). Still, much debate remains about the home of CSR and sustainability in the corporate hierarchy. Specifically, debate between the home of CSR as a human resources (HR) initiative or as a public relations (PR) effort remains stagnant with little directional movement toward either field.

Donnalyn Pompper, editor of the volume *Corporate Social Responsibility, Sustainability, and Ethical Public Relations: Strengthening Synergies with Human Resources*, says now is the time to re-examine the place of CSR and sustainability in their conflicting relationships with public relations and human resources (Pompper, 2017, p. 21). In the book, Pompper addresses the debate by arguing for HR-PR departmental cohesion in order to work as the “organizational conscience” of the company or nonprofit to further support CSR and sustainability efforts

and thereby enhance the organization's reputation (Pompper, 2017, p. 17). Throughout this collection, the authors provide a clear argument with evidence in the form of various case studies, interviews, and content analyses for the cooperation of the two departments.

Composition and Organization of this Book

The collection of work includes articles covering how CSR/sustainability measures can help with a wide range of business challenges, including those faced by HR departments. Several of the chapters mention how successful CSR initiatives can enhance hiring practices, particularly Chapter 4 by Heinrich, "Overcoming Regional Retention Issues: How Some Michigan Organizations Use CSR to Attract and Engage Top Talent" and Chapter 9 by Howes, "Hiring Programs for Military Veterans and Athletes Use HR and PR to Demonstrate Human Dimension of Corporate Social Responsibility." Other chapters focus on how CSR already enhances the overall organization, including Chapter 5 by Wood, Berger, and Roberts, "Corporate Social Responsibility, Volunteerism, and Social Identity: A Case Study of Cotopaxi" and Chapter 7 by Oshin-Martin, "Corporate Social Responsibility: Johnson & Johnson Creating Community Relations and Value through Open Social Innovation and Partnership across Sub-Saharan Africa."

In Chapter 2, "Organizations, HR, CSR, and Their Social Networks: 'Sustainability' on Twitter," Lipschultz explores how these topics are discussed on Twitter to understand how employees can become advocates or brand ambassadors for their companies, while the authors of Chapter 6, Dusingize and Nyiransabimana, interviewed internal and external university publics for their project, "A Study of University Social Responsibility Practices at Rwanda's Institut Catholique de Kabgayi," to find the definition to the vague term "university social responsibility." Recognizing the importance of engaging future potential employees, Chapter 3 by Bradford, "Nonprofit Social Responsibility and

Sustainability: Engaging Urban Youth through Empowerment,” utilized a content analysis to provide evidence for how existing nonprofits empower youth through CSR.

The book even includes a case study wherein the failure to integrate CSR/sustainability and corporate values throughout the entire corporation led to disaster, which is discussed in Chapter 10 by Stokes, “Failure to Activate: EpiPen, Legitimacy Challenges, and the Importance of Employee CSR.” These in-depth studies of how specific organizations used CSR/sustainability within their organizations and how CSR/sustainability is discussed online provide the growing field of PR literature with key examples that may be useful for future theory development or for classroom instruction.

The chapters provide positive examples of companies whose CSR initiatives are cohesive from top to bottom including Cotopaxi (Chapter 5), Johnson & Johnson (Chapter 7), and MGM Resorts International (Chapter 11). While the inclusion of a variety of companies of differing size and business structure provides evidence for how this proposed mix of HR and PR works on various scales, the companies have one major ideal in common—they are led by their ethical integrity. Presumably, their internal communications and CSR/sustainability efforts are not led by only their HR or PR departments but by their organization as a whole.

Similarly, in Chapter 8, “Examining Public Relations’ Role in Shaping Organizational Culture, with Implications for PR, HR, and CSR/Sustainability,” Bourland-Davis and Graham provide a case study wherein findings indicate that “CSR/Sustainability can be an organizational value in and of itself, and that corporate culture can be strengthened with the coordination of PR and HR efforts” (Pompper, 2017, p. 214). Stating that the corporate culture will be strengthened by the coordinated efforts implies that the culture must be pre-established, further pointing to the need for direction from the top of the organization in order to develop a

CSR/sustainability mission within the organization.

Pompper provides a well-developed collection of work that successfully points to the need for cooperation between HR and PR departments by examining CSR/sustainability from a wide variety of organization types and sizes. This book raises more questions than it answers, which matches the nature of a developing research field. Authors do not offer a CSR or sustainability theory, rather they utilize various theories, including excellence theory and social exchange theory, among others. Additionally, nearly every chapter mentions the difficulty in defining CSR and sustainability, but no chapter seeks to thoroughly define the two terms. The chapters primarily use the two terms interchangeably. For this reason, the book points to the need for a universally accepted definition of the two terms in order to provide corporations with information that may assist in their efforts to distinguish between those two programs internally.

This collection would also benefit from quantitative studies as a means of providing an example of the return on investment that organizations can expect from having these programs. Nearly every study included either a content analysis or a series of interviews, which are appropriate for the intended purpose of this collection; however, future research should develop measurements for these initiatives. Additionally, the book points to a need for suggestions for organizational structures that will encourage this type of synergy between departments, in addition to further research into how to build a clear framework for organizations to use in establishing CSR/sustainability practices throughout their businesses.

Who Would Benefit from Reading this Book?

This book offers a variety of practical and theoretical insights, and as such, it would be an appropriate text for a course that covers CSR and/or sustainability topics. Because the discussion situates itself between the

business world (HR) and the communications world (PR), it would also be appropriate in a business school course, particularly within an HR or a marketing communications curriculum. Practically, the insights offered would be useful to organizational departments that have responsibility for corporate social responsibility or sustainability initiatives. This may be the traditional HR or PR department, but it could also be a sustainability department, a marketing department, or a public information office. The findings from the studies offer insights into how to more effectively integrate initiatives into the organization to maximize effectiveness, regardless of the initiative's home. Of course, like Pompper's other books on sustainability communication and CSR (e.g., Pompper, 2015), this is a must-read for anyone who researches this area. Overall, this is an interesting book that fills a need to explore how CSR and sustainability are managed within organizations and how different departments can uniquely contribute to their success.

References

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