

Title - What is Corporate Social Responsibility and Why Should Managers Engage With It?

Keywords - Sustainable Development

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Group - This case study describes a lecture and seminar session that encourage students to think about stakeholder perspectives, and to take a more philosophical view of the issues raised in their management programme

Activity - Level two undergraduate students studying a suite of eight fields within the above school.

Aim - The aim of the session is to introduce students to the notion of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and how corporations may 'balance' decisions on particular issues, in relation to their impact and political* significance.

*Political in this instance is meant to reflect a broad meaning, not only governmental, but also within the political context of an organisation.

Context / Background - This particular lecture is part of a module entitled Understanding Groups and Organisations. The module is one from a suite of three modules that run throughout the undergraduate programme at the University. This 'thread' of modules explores the multi-disciplinary nature of Leisure Management and takes as the theoretical base sociology, philosophy and social psychology. The module itself explores: groups and organisations; social relations and the means of production; power and authority; social stratification and inequalities. The lecture seeks to introduce students to the notion of corporate social responsibility, in the belief that as future managers they will have to weigh up the impact that their business will have upon the wider community.

Example - The lecture is structured as a one hour formal class session (essentially information giving, with some input from the class), followed by a one hour seminar based upon a case study of a Premiership football club.

Formal Class Session

The formal class session traces the history of CSR and follows that through to the modern era. It also deals with an opposing view to CSR, notably Milton Friedman's view of economic prosperity, and asks whether there are any social benefits to this particular stance. It then goes on to discuss the role of government in business, which follows on nicely from Friedman's view. Towards the end of the session two

distinct conceptual models are discussed, these being Carroll's Four Part Model of CSR and the Power / Interest matrix. Carroll's model is used to describe how organisations move from economic and legislative responsibilities towards ethical and philanthropic responsibilities, whilst 'society's' expectations tend to be focussed more towards philanthropy.

This particular example re-iterates to students the nature of the external environment impacting upon business. The Power / Interest Matrix allows students to understand the political environment that business decisions are made within. The matrix is also used in the seminar session that follows the lecture.

The Seminar

The students are given a case study of a Premiership football club that identifies a number of stakeholders with opposing views. The session is split into two phases as highlighted below:

Phase One

Upon reading the information students are split into four distinct categories as follows: 1) loyal fans of the club; 2) the board of directors of the club; 3) shareholders; 4) chairs of lower league clubs. The groups are then asked to come to a consensus on whether the business direction that the football club is considering is acceptable in their group's opinion. Each group is then expected to give a short presentation to the rest of the seminar group on their position.

Phase Two

During this phase all of the students are asked to take on the role of the club's board of directors. They are asked to consider the various positions (identified in phase one) of the stakeholders and suggest some alternatives that the club may consider as appropriate. Finally they are asked to plot onto the Power / Interest Matrix where they believe the various stakeholders should be and then asked what decision they would make.

Results / Feedback - This session is delivered early on in the semester and it deals with some complex theories, once philosophical arguments of 'right' and 'good' are explored. The majority of the students are studying management programmes and so the philosophical element is quite difficult for them to engage in, particularly as the session deliberately sets out to question deep-seated beliefs about the utility of business. However once the students are de-programmed from an operations management mindset, they begin to understand the political nature of business decisions. This particular session's seminars were split into separate gender groups and it was found that the male seminar session engaged well in the case study, whereas the majority of the female seminar group did not engage with the case study material. However, the students agreed that it was helpful to identify how business decisions, that have an impact outside the organisation, are weighed up.

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