

Good example of fashion business ethics and sustainability critical thinking

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Fashion Business Ethics and sustainability

The substance of CSR

Corporate social responsibility entails a set of principles and initiatives undertaken by a company to respond to the effects of its business on the environment, the social welfare of the people, and the community at large.

Every business organization has a set of initiatives that allow the organization to respond to the effects of its business on the people. Such initiatives could be on matters education, environmental conservation, provision of relief services, or providing health services to the community.

CSR is also known as corporate citizenship and the initiatives contained therein depend on the size and nature of the business organization. The ensuing session will discuss the dimensions of corporate social responsibility as discussed by Alexander Dahlsrud.

The Dimensions of Corporate Social Responsibility

Alexander Dahlsrud discussed five dimensions of corporate social responsibility in his attempted definition of the term. This came at a time when there was a lot of bias in the definition of the term (Dahlsrud, 2006). This was therefore an attempt to harmonize the various definitions that had been put forward by various scholars of the subject. To start with, he talked about the environmental dimension which concerns itself with a clean inhabitable environment with minimal or no pollution at all. In this dimension, Dahlsrud proposed that the corporate social responsibility initiatives should put a lot of emphasis on a clean environment and that organizations should come up with measure to mitigate the effects of their

effluent waste on the environment to make it more habitable for the human and animal species.

Concerning the social dimension, Dahlsrud suggested that corporate social responsibility initiatives should put a lot of emphasis on the organization's relationship with the society. In this regard, such initiatives as improving the standard of living of the people on matters education, health and other social welfare activities should fit this category. Concerning the economic dimension, he suggested that CSR initiatives should be focused on maintaining the profitability as well as contributing to national economic prosperity. This emphasis on the economic development will make sure that more job opportunities are created. On the dimension of stakeholders, he was of the view that any such initiative should ensure that all stakeholders are kept closer and these include the employees, the creditors, the suppliers and the customers. This is because without them, the business is doomed. Lastly on the voluntariness dimension, the organization should strive to voluntarily participate in actions that are not prescribed by the law as a way of cementing its relationships with the people that it serves and who act as stakeholders.

According to Carroll's pyramid of Social Responsibility, a lot of emphasis is on philanthropic responsibilities, ethical responsibilities, obedience to law and economic initiatives (Carroll, 1999). Other focus is on human right enhancement, health and safety of employees at the workplace, avoidance unfair business practices and environmental aspects. There are three pillars of sustainable development and these are the economy, the society and the environment. This means that for an organization to succeed in its CSR

initiatives, then it must ensure that it maximizes on the three pillars (Yu, 2008).

Corporate Social Responsibility within the textiles-apparel pipeline

The textile industry is characterised by increased production of garments for wear both locally and internationally, presence of supply chains all over the world which link the producer and the customer, presence of skilled and unskilled labour because some activities do not require specialized skills and lack of the many barriers to trade that characterize the other businesses.

There are several activities in the garment making industry hence the need for corporate social responsibility initiatives to make it possible for the organization to link with the stakeholders and the communities in the best way possible.

The information available at the Gap website is to the effect that the industry is complex and lacks the requisite standards and regulations that are required of a business organization. Furthermore, there is no uniformity in the standards that are expected of all textile industries all over the world and it appears that each organization is guided by its own initiatives in the market (Pretious, 2006). For example, the garment manufacturers have a poor understanding of the labour laws that exist, they lack the requisite supervision skills and also the capacity to assess the efficacy, suitability and quality of various textile materials that are presented to them. The buyers do not bother to emphasise on good quality material and are therefore satisfied with all that they get. The industry and country conditions are also not conducive for a healthy textile industry and therefore the need for sound

corporate social responsibility initiatives arise.

In the midst of the above problems, the need for a standard CSR moral test arises. The problem is who has the moral responsibility to set the moral values to necessitate the CSR initiatives? This is because the country and industry climate is not conducive for such initiatives, the buyers do not know their rights of demanding quality garments and other services and the garment manufacturers lack sufficient understanding of these requirements. There is the need to develop a long-lasting relationship with the suppliers of the materials and the buyers so that there is flow (Towers, 2013). It is only possible if all the stakeholders in this case the suppliers, customers and the manufacturers know their duties, responsibilities and rights. Along the same line, there is need for a sustainable pricing and timely payment for the materials ordered for and those purchased for by the customers. This will enhance the moral values and responsibilities of all the stakeholders. Realistic buying schedules and also those for making orders to suppliers should also be put in place if at all the stakeholders intend to maintain friendly relations and ethical values. Without these, the CSR initiatives are doomed to fail.

Regarding CSR initiatives in the textile industry further, some important areas need to be interrogated. These include the need for standard wages for all workers in the industry, the need for clear plans for a healthy and safe working environment for all workers in the industry, making it possible for all workers to freely associate among themselves for collective bargaining and freedom from discrimination of all kinds. This is only possible by the provision of an ethical code of conduct for all the categories of stakeholders

that are involved in the textile industry (Frost, 2006). These include the suppliers, manufacturers, customers and employees.

An example of such codes of conduct include Gap Code of Vendor Conduct which addresses various issues for example prohibition of child labour, prohibition of psychological coercion of workers, freedom of association for collective bargaining, among others.

Child Labour

Child labour refers to the use of children in places of work. Such work deprives the children their right to education, parental care, shelter, and clothing and affects the children physically, morally and is therefore considered exploitative and harmful. Most international organizations consider child labour offensive on the part of the child and therefore have illegalized it. An example is the International Labour Organization (ILO) which makes it illegal to employ an underage child to perform any work for a salary or wages. Stiff penalties are imposed on those persons or organizations that contravene these regulations (Smestad, 2010). It is also considered unethical to engage children in labour and therefore various propositions have been put forward to curb this menace. The ensuing session will discuss some theories of ethical behaviour at the work place in an attempt to make a sound discussion on the crucial topic.

Ethical Theories in Business and their relation to child labour

Business ethics perspectives relate to the right and wrong. In this session, due to the gravity of the topic of child labour, it is important to advance

some ethical theories and perspectives and in so doing make a proposition that child labour is not the right thing to do and is therefore against morals. When discussing ethical theories in business, there are two extreme positions advanced by scholars. One such position is absolutism which proposes that there are right things to do and wrong things not to do (Greenwood, 2002). In this case, there are therefore principles that guide people on the right things and also to bar them against doing the wrong things. On the issue of child labour, this position will suggest that it is the wrong thing to do because all principles including those of the International Labour Organization have prohibited it. The other position is that of ethical relativism which proposes that moral stands and ethical values in a business depend on the circumstances and the things that surround the particular phenomenon. As such, the moral values are not set beforehand for everyone to follow them but instead they are implied on the surroundings.

The normative case of the business suggests that something is ethical if it is the right thing that should have been done (Bollé, 1998). This has a relationship with the utilitarian philosophy which proposes that things are ethical if they are done for the greater happiness of all people. Touching on child labour, such an act would be unethical because it is not for the greater happiness and good of all people. Think of a situation that a child is denied education and child care due to employment by the business. In such a case, the act would be not only unethical but also immoral. On the other hand, Kant's theory of deontology would propose that it would be illegal to violate the basic rights of the child because it is among those rights that cannot be derogated from the child because they are constitutionally granted to the

child and also recognized in international instruments like the United Nations Rights Declaration of Human Rights and also the United Nations Convention for the Rights of the Child. The business case will argue that the undertaking is good for the business and among the targeted initiatives of Corporate Social Responsibility. Obviously, child labour is not in the best interest of both the business and the child and also one of the CSR initiatives that the business would undertake. As such, a company will not engage in child labour in such a case.

Kant's categorical imperative would apply a number of maxims to support the case that child labour is not permissible (Vyakarnam, 1997). These are consistency, human dignity in the sense that child labour is against human dignity and universality in the sense that child labour is an evil that is universally rejected. Contemporary ethical approaches on the other hand would argue that it is against virtue ethics to employ a child. Feministic approaches would be of the view that a child should be taken care of and also shown empathy. Discourse theory will argue that it would not be rational to employ a child while postmodern theories will postulate that it is morally wrong to employ a child (Smestad, 2010).

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